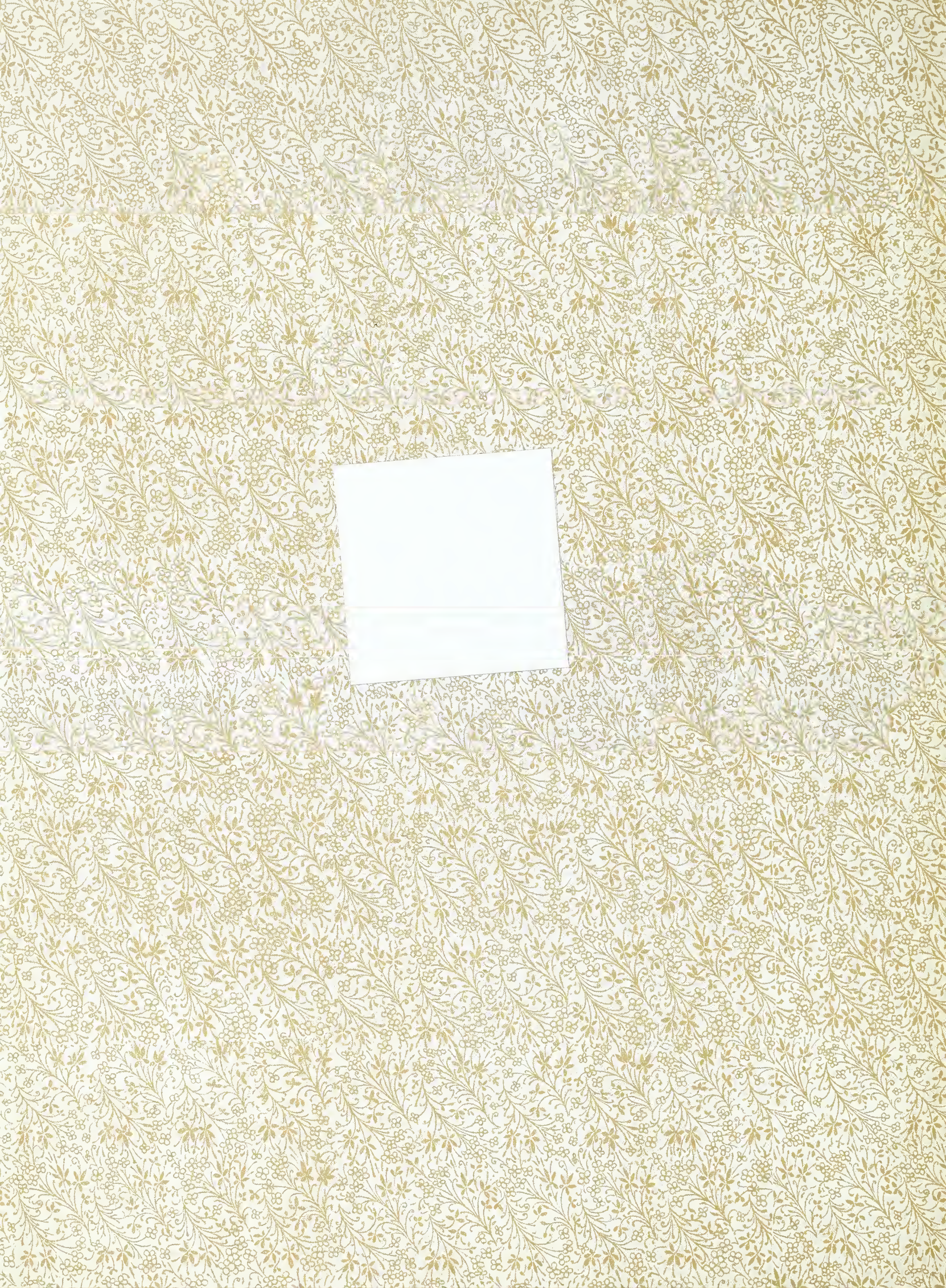


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THE ART OF
WILLIAM MORRIS

BY LEWIS F. DAY.







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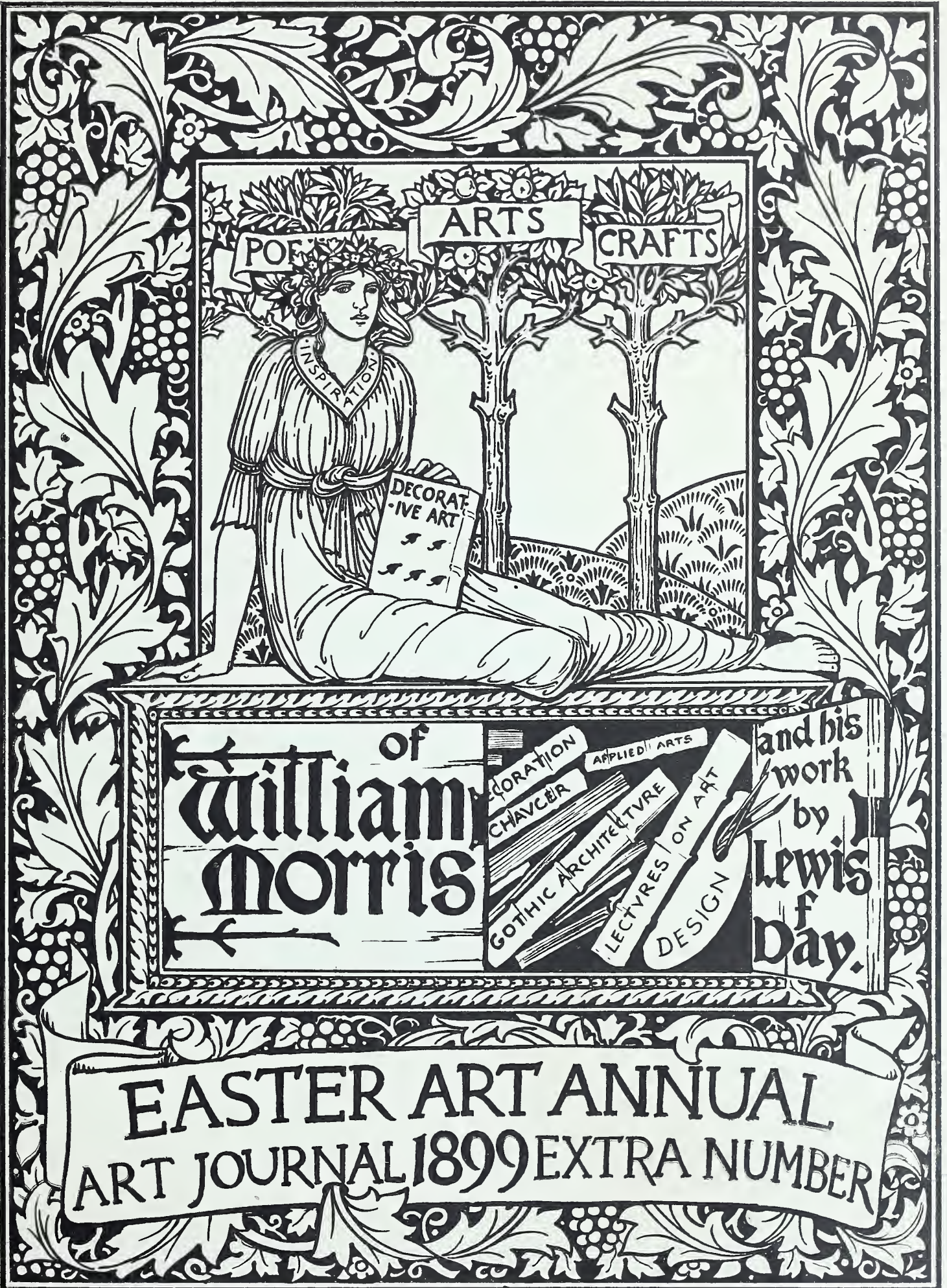
THE ART OF WILLIAM MORRIS



HELIOCHROME

"FLORA."—Sketch design for Tapestry executed by Morris & Co.

Figure by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Ornament by William Morris. 1886.



of
**William
MORRIS**

DECORATION
CHAUVER
GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE
APPLIED ARTS
LECTURES ON ART
DESIGN

and his
work
by
**Lewis
f
Day.**

EASTER ART ANNUAL
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WILLIAM MORRIS AND HIS ART.

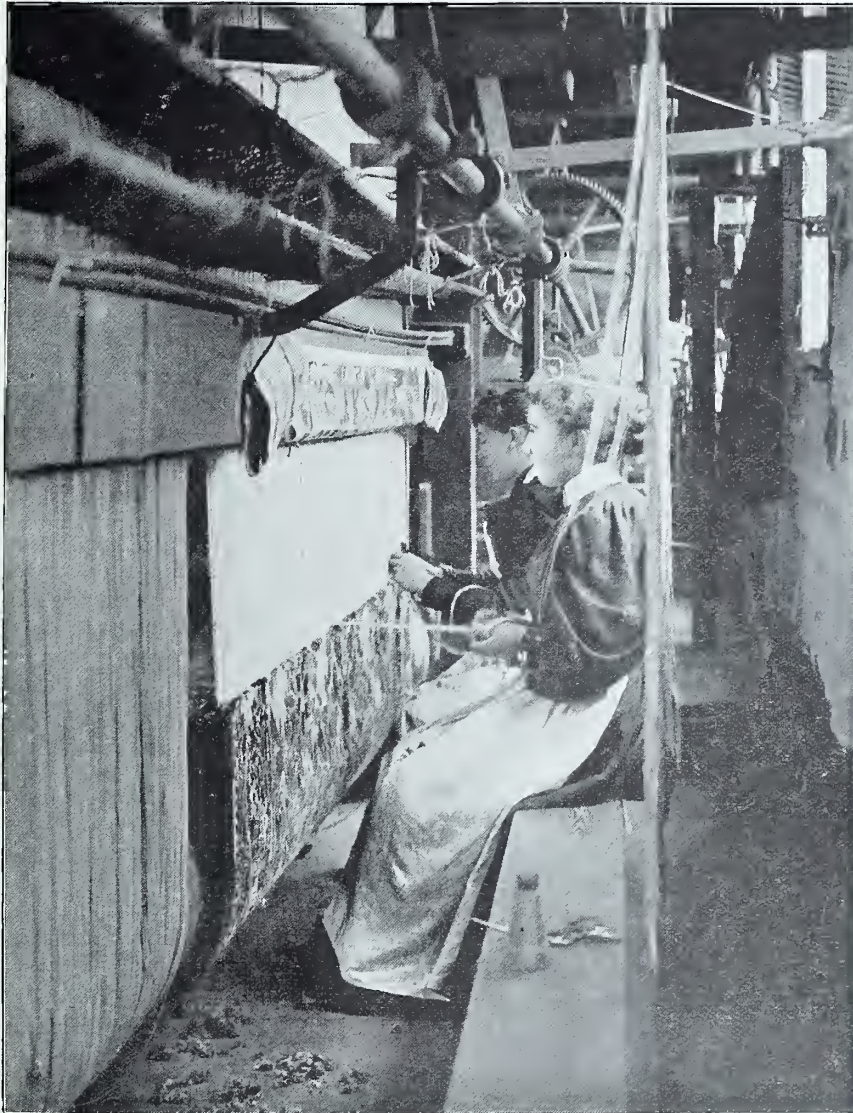
NO one in the least interested in Decorative Art—and who is there does not profess that much?—wants to be told at this time of day who William Morris was. His name is prominent among the few true poets of the age; it heads the list of those who in our days have wrought and fought for the lesser arts—for art, that is to say, in the larger sense of the word. He it was snatched from the hand of Ruskin the torch which Pugin earlier in the century had kindled, and fired the love of beauty in us. He was the staunchest defender of our ancient

care for art. His old friend Mr. F. S. Ellis tells (in a paper read before the Society of Arts, May 10th, 1898) how he went to the Exhibition of 1851—he was then seventeen years old—and how he sat himself down on a seat, and steadily refused to go over the building, declining to see anything more wonderful in this wonder of the world than that it was “wonderfully ugly.” He never got over that prejudice against the Great Fair, which he accused of giving the death-stroke to traditional design in this country. Nevertheless, he owed something, if not to that event, to the awakened interest in artistic production of which it was the outward and visible sign.

For Morris was born just at the right moment: the way was prepared for him. Walter Scott, without really appreciating Gothic art, had called popular attention to its romance, Rickman had long since “discriminated” the “styles of English Architecture,” Pugin had published his “True Principles of Gothic Architecture,” and was designing all manner of mediæval furniture; and, by the time he came to take any heed of art, Gothic architecture was the fashion. Winston had written his *Essay on Stained Glass*, Shaw and others had published books on mediæval antiquities, and Viollet le Duc his famous dictionary; even Owen Jones, the orientalist, had cleared the ground, by creating a reaction of taste against mere naturalism in pretending to be design. Fergusson, Freeman, Semper, Wornum, Digby Wyatt, and above all, Ruskin, had been writing about art until people were beginning to listen. Men like William Burges and E. W. Godwin were hard at work already: there was reaction in the air: the times were ready for the man—and the man was William Morris.

He seems to have gone to Oxford with a quite open mind on the subject of Art; but there the spirit of Mediævalism was abroad, and he promptly caught the infection. Ruskin was an influence there; it was later that Rossetti went down to decorate the walls of the

Union, and there he became almost at once close friends with Edward Burne-Jones, his life-long fellow worker, who, by a strange coincidence, matriculated on the same day with himself. That was in 1852. But it was at literature that he first began to work, establishing the “Oxford and Cambridge Magazine.” Mr. Ellis tells us that for the year of its existence he found the necessary funds. That was an early instance of a liberality characteristic of him to the last. A short year in the office of George Edmund Street when he left Oxford, in 1856, was enough to sicken him of professional architecture, which seemed at first, and was in those days thought to be, the entrance-gate to all the arts not claiming to be fine. He may at one



‘Hammersmith’
Carpet Weaving
at Merton
Abbey Works
(pp. 5 and 2).

monuments. He stamped the mark of his personality upon the design of his generation. There seemed no limit to his enterprise, no end to his endeavour—but death, which came too soon.

The very variety, however, of his activity, the many forms in which his vitality found vent, tend in a measure to create confusion as to what he did precisely. Enquiry into the order of his work and the date at which it was done, goes far to dissipate such confusion, and to show, not only what he did, but how it was possible for him to do so much.

The circumstances of his early youth do not seem to have been such as to implant or encourage in him any

1899.

Morris's Works
at Merton
Abbey, Surrey
(p. 5).



time have contemplated painting ; but the publication in 1858 of the "Defence of Guinevere" seems to show that for a while he devoted himself to poetry. And as a poet he first became known.

It was, perhaps, the difficulty which he has told us he experienced in getting decent furniture and fittings for his own house, when he married in 1859, which irritated him into artistic activity once more. At all events, in 1861 he set to work in earnest to produce beautiful things for the house, and, with his friends, started business in Red Lion Square. The idea of reviving art in

everything about us was not entirely new. So long before as 1847 "Felix Summerly," to whom we owe South Kensington Museum, had organised a combination of artists, including Creswick, Dyce, Maclise (who ought to have been a designer), Mulready, Bell, and Westmacott, for the production of "Art Manufactures." It is true they called them manufactures, and they did not do great things ; but it was set forth in the prospectus that "Beauty of Form and Colour and poetic invention were (once) associated with everything. So it ought to be still, and, we will say, shall be again." Morris put it better ; but that is in effect what he said ; and he managed to bring it about.

The venture of the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., was itself a protest against what was already being done, and was resented accordingly by the trades. It was in 1866, I remember, that the name of the firm first came to my ears, and I asked an old hand at design who they were. The answer was : "A set of amateurs who are going to teach us our trade." Amateurs in a sense they were, no doubt ; that is to say, they set to work at many a trade about which they knew very little, and worried out the secret of it for themselves, distrusting the knowledge which was to be acquired from men who had served their apprenticeship to it ; but the wonderful thing is that they did teach the trade its business ; and it was practically Morris who did it.

Others before them had started with high artistic ideals, but had lacked the courage to go on, or had been drawn by hard circumstances, or driven perhaps by necessity, into the ways of trade ; he had not only convictions of his own and the courage of them, but was in a position to hold fast to them. He was in every sense of the word independent : his father was dead, and he could go his own way, and from the time of his coming of age he was what most of us would call well-off. He never knew what it was to lack the means of livelihood or to fear for them. He was free to

Vine pattern
Wall-paper
(pp. 18 and 21).
Working drawing
by William
Morris.
1874.



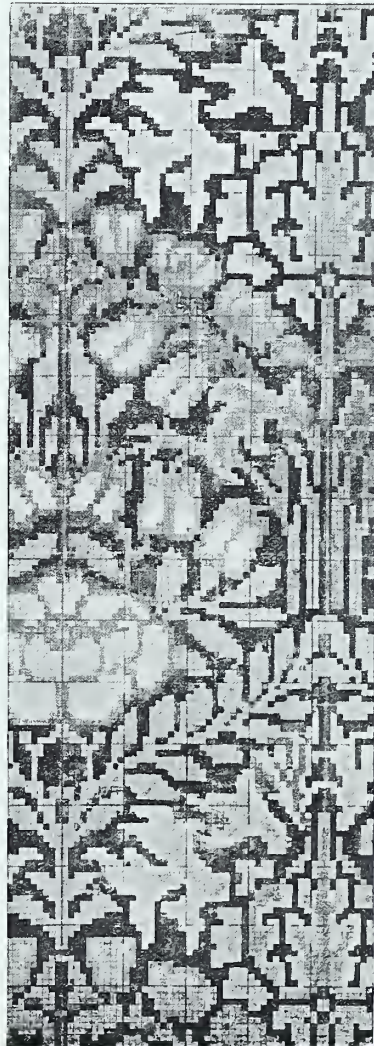


Merton Abbey Works, from the bridge (p. 6).

carry out his artistic ideal. He had no occasion to bow to the demands of trade or fashion. This gave him a splendid chance—and he took it.

The earlier work of the firm was of course pronouncedly Gothic in style; so much so that the medals awarded to them at the exhibition of 1862 were given for “exactness of imitation” of mediæval work. The wording of the award may express more nearly the point of view of the judges than the aim of the exhibitors; but it was inevitable that the new firm, starting when it did, and as it did, should begin by working very much in the old way.

However, Morris soon made Gothic his own, and used it to express himself. His mediævalism was in the end distinctly modern; but he boasted himself always a Goth. “The age is ugly,” he said; “if a man wants to do anything, he must just choose the epoch which suits him and identify himself with that; he must be a thirteenth-century man, for instance.” That is very much what he would fain have been—“intrepidly retrograde,” as a French critic said. The logic of his argument is not convincing; but his sympathies were all with mediævalism, and he harked back to the time when, as he was firmly persuaded, art got off the track. He did all he could to forget six centuries or so and make-believe we were living in the Middle Ages—a feat impossible for most of us, but all of a piece with the childlike simple-mindedness of the man. So convinced was he of the goodness of all things Gothic, and mainly of Gothic things, that if a thing seemed good to him, it almost followed that it was Gothic; thus, appreciating the value of continuous growth in pattern, he puts it down as a matter of course to the time “when young Gothic Art took the place of old Classic,” quite forgetting that the ancients had ever perfected the continuous scroll, and that the only new departure of the Middle Ages was, to put scrolls of flowing ornament side by side and make “all-over” patterns of them.



Rose pattern
Wilton Pile
Carpet (p. 22).
First design and
working drawing by William
Morris.
Ca. 1877.

Peacock pattern (p. 22).
Coarse
Wool Hangings.
Working drawing by William
Morris.
1878.



The early work of the firm embraced the greater part of what goes to house decoration, including the production of stained glass, painted tiles, embroidery, cabinet-work, and, presently, woven and printed stuffs; and it may be gathered from the fact of its removal, in 1865, to Queen Square, that it soon began to flourish; at all events, from that time it became generally known.

A year later Morris had a chance of showing what he could do at South Kensington Museum, where he decorated the small dining-room known as the green room, a very typical example of his work at that time. The distribution of the walls, their modelled surface (painted too!), the fruit and figure panels on a gold ground, the lively frieze, the colour scheme—all of which to-day do not much stir the curiosity of the casual diner—were new and rather startling innovations in decoration more than thirty years ago.

From that time he took up one branch of industry after another, his appetite for such work increasing, one may say, abnormally in eating. He did not make quite all the things he designed and brought out; his wall-papers were printed, and continue to be printed, by Mr. Metford Warner (better known as Jeffrey and Co.); and his first chintzes were printed by Mr. (now Sir Thomas) Wardle. But, like all real workers, he preferred to do his own work, and would rather do it himself than be at the bother to tell someone else how it could be done; and before long he was printing his own cotton stuffs, and weaving his own textiles; and, by the middle of the seventies, he was dyeing his own wools for weaving. You might have met him any day in the street with dye-stained hands; for he was a born workman, never afraid of soiling their whiteness; and he was far too much alive to stand by and see anyone bungling over what he himself could do better, and not set to work to show him how to do better.

In the midst of his artistic activity, or in the lulls between, he found time to write the poems which soon made him famous. Of these it is not here the place, nor is the present writer the person, to speak, further than to point out how the poet helped naturally to make the artist known. The mere fact that a poet of repute, near friend of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, was devoting himself to the lesser arts, made them of more account, in the eyes of the literate at all events. The younger generation of artists and amateurs, accustomed to the fashionable gush about "arts and crafts," have no idea of what a very obscure

Dove and Rose pattern (p. 21).
Silk and Wool
Damask.
Working drawing
by William
Morris.
1879.



dreamt of turning the ruins of an old Norman monastery into workshops; he would have preserved them piously, as ancient monuments, to be held in trust for posterity; but he found manufacture already established there, and so long established (that is, since the Reformation) that it was itself an institution worth preservation. And there he carried on the crafts he cared for, in the way he thought they should be carried on, the only way in which it seemed to him they were worth continuing, by the traditional methods of handicraft, with as little resort to machinery as possible, with a view always to the artistic worth of the thing done, and to the reasonable satisfaction of the workman in doing it.

A visit to the works at Merton Abbey gives one a peep, as it were, into the past he loved so dearly he must needs continually fall out with the present, so far short of his ideal. The primitive methods of dyeing, printing and weaving, still in work there, just suited his notion of design, which was indeed shaped according to the traditions of craftsmanship. There is nothing of the modern "factory" about his "mills"; an old-world air clings to the place, an atmosphere of quiet, and of some leisure, in which the workers, not harried to death, have space to breathe, and to enjoy something of the repose and beauty of the

person the decorative artist was a quarter of a century ago. The meanest craftsman is now ranked as an artist; then the master of his craft, unless he painted pictures or carved statues, was put down as a mere artisan. The author of "The Earthly Paradise" could not be relegated to that position; what such a man thought worth doing was clearly worth taking seriously; and decorative art began to be taken at his valuation—that is to say, at something like its true worth, as the root and stock of all art, of which fine art is only the flower.

His personal repute made it possible for him to pursue his ideal, and to fulfil it; and in 1877 he opened the premises still occupied by the firm of Morris and Co. in Oxford Street—sure sign of further prosperity—and by the year 1881 he had finally quitted the old quarters in Queen Square, and established his unique workshops at Merton Abbey. Morris himself would probably never have



Bird and Vine pattern (p. 21).
Wool Damask.
Working drawing
by William
Morris.
1881.

Cotton Printing
at Merton
Abbey Works
(p. 5).



world. Imagine, by the Wandle's side, an old walled garden. On the banks, long, low-roofed worksheds, and a waterwheel revolving at its ease; long strips of printed cotton a-rinsing in the stream; great hanks of yarn, fresh from the indigo vat, hung drying in the air; dyers and printers moving quietly about—in all, a sunlit picture of most peaceful work.

Morris expected work of his workpeople: work was no hardship to him; and he did to his workmen always as he would have been done by. At Merton he began carpet-weaving and there presently he set up his tapestry looms, having first mastered the craft for himself. It was characteristic of him that he should have put up a loom in his bedroom at home, and there taught himself tapestry weaving in the early hours of the morning, when the rest of the household were abed—you see the workman there. Each separate enterprise on which he entered seems, for a time, to have moved him to extraordinary energy. He thought it out, installed it, set it going, designed for it, trained men and women in the work to be done; and then, by degrees, as things began to run smoothly and could be trusted to go on without him, his interest became less active; a new idea germinated in his mind, or an old one burst into bud, and his energies broke out afresh in some new doing.

He had attended less and less to the business in Oxford Street whilst he was organising experimental industries at Merton. When these were flourishing, he left them, as he had left the shop, very much to his partners, furnishing such designs as were required of him, or as occurred to him, and satisfying himself that the work was being done as he would wish, but making his visits to the works rarer and rarer as he became more deeply absorbed in the subject of typography and printing. It was in 1891 that the first

volume was issued from the Kelmscott Press, and from that time he became very much the master-printer, his invention finding fresh scope in the design of title-pages, initials, borders, and book ornaments innumerable, superficially in one mediæval style of his own, but showing in their detail all the fancy and resourcefulness which belonged to him to the last. Had he but lived another ten years, he would certainly have made himself master of yet a craft or two before he died. It is interesting, in connection with his type printing, to remember, that in his youth he illuminated for his wife and friends precious volumes of poetry, penned by his own hand. The pages which, a little further on, by Lady Burne-Jones's great kindness we are enabled to illustrate, show him to have been no less careful as a calligrapher than cunning as a designer, and expert as a painter in miniature.

The current of his poetical writing, which all his life long never ran dry, flowed in his later years into the channel of prose stories told in beautiful, if somewhat archaic, language of his own, not unrelated to the mediævalism pervading his design. But the writings which concern us are his writings upon art. It is often said that an artist should say what he has to say in his art, and not talk about it. That is an admirable theory—for the inarticulate; but there are many things an artist may wish to say which cannot properly be expressed in his art, and which he may well want to put into words, more especially if he chance to be, as Morris was, a master of words also. He is a standing protest against any narrow dictum which would gag an artist. He had more to say than could be put into ornament, or even into poetry; and he said it not merely admirably, but with a delightful sincerity, straight from his heart. It was in 1877 that he first set forth the Principles of the Society for the

Protection of Ancient Buildings, of which society he was a foremost founder and a bulwark to the last; and between that time and 1881 he delivered every year at least a lecture or two upon art. Five of these were printed under the title of "Hopes and Fears for Art." Others live only in newspaper reports.

Strictly speaking, he did not often write about art, but printed his lectures—just as he gave them; and you read the accent into them as you peruse the book; you seem to hear him speak; and in his speech there was none of the deliberate artificiality of his prose story-telling; he was as simple as could be, as frank and as downright, so obviously convinced of the unanswerable truth of what he said, that he carried conviction with him—at least for the while you heard him. We all of us think we are in the right, Morris knew he was—even when he was most mistaken. His logic, as a great French critic said *apropos* of a brother critic, was "ardently combative." He had a way of talking and writing as if he were opposing some one, and must bear his adversary down. The fact is, probably, that he felt himself so much in opposition to the normal habit of philistine thought, that he looked for resistance, and made haste to get in the first blow.

The second series of his lectures, which appeared in 1888 under the title of "Signs of Change," were confessedly "Socialist"—he devoted, about this time and before, an enormous amount of his time and energy to socialistic work—but some of them at least deal directly with things artistic, which, as he thought, and as Ruskin, his friend and master, as he called him, thought, cannot be separated from social life; Pugin thought it bound up with religious life. Many of us recognise, of course, the intimate relationship of art to life, without arguing from that the necessity of socialism. Morris did; and there is no shadow of doubt as to his sincerity and enthusiasm.

Those who, agreeing in the main with his diagnosis of the social anemia of the century-end, have no very great faith in his remedy, are tempted to regret the precious time he gave to the diffusion of the socialistic idea. There is some consolation in the reflection that most of his lectures, having been delivered with a purpose more or less socialistic, he might very possibly, but for "the cause," never have delivered himself upon the subject on which we wanted him to speak. In his last years he naturally delivered himself oftener on the subject most on his mind, printing, woodcuts, "the Ideal Book"—to which he more nearly than any modern printer himself attained. There is probably no one of the various branches of art which he in turn took up, on which he did not say his say; and, so outspoken was he, that no serious student of his work could fail to understand just what he meant to do, even if he had not succeeded in doing it, which he almost invariably did.

Morris was inspired by a passionate love of beauty, and had a corresponding hatred of the ugliness he saw about him. He set himself to mend that state of things. Impossible! they said. No matter, he



Painted Decoration of soffits of arches in staircase in St. James's Palace (p. 27). Designed by William Morris. 1861.

would try. But he did not covet beauty for his own selfish enjoyment merely, least of all did he desire it at the

Washing the
Cloth at Merton
Abbey Works
(p. 6).



expense of others. He protested vehemently against the supposition that art was for the privileged few, for the "upper classes," whom he would have liked to abolish, and who, curiously enough, bought his work and gave him his repute. Art, he said, was meant to raise man's life above the daily tangle of small things that weary him; and he adopted, without reserve, the theory that the first step towards art worth having was to make the life of the worker worth living. "Let me say it, that either I have erred in the aim of my whole life, or that the welfare of these lesser arts involves the question of the content and self-respect of all craftsmen." He believed that if only life were easier, and men had time to look about them, they would learn to love art. Whether that be so or not, it was a noble thought of his; and noble thoughts go to make great art possible. The converse certainly is true, that mean and sordid surroundings deaden the sense of beauty, and degrade alike the poor folk who make ugly things and the rich ones who live amidst them.

He was never weary of protesting against the ugliness of life. Life should be beautiful! For himself he was in a position to shape things about him as he would have them; but that was not enough for him, was nothing to him. Hungry as he was for beauty, he had no stomach for a feast of art whilst others were starving; rather coarse food which all could share, than dainties denied to them. It is seldom that a high ideal is so perfectly expressed as his aspiration towards "*an art made by the people, and for the people, as a happiness to the maker and user.*" If it seems to us that his splendid ideal is impractical, his hope never to be realised—and it is to be feared it does—that is perhaps because we are less nobly

minded; it takes a big man to have great hopes, the least of us can reach pessimism.

The sight of such a man spending his great gifts and wondrous energies in holding forth to a dozen or so of "comrades" leagues away from any right understanding of him, was grotesque enough almost to make one doubt his sense of humour. In reality he had a keen sense of fun, as no one who ever heard him read "Brer Rabbit" could doubt; but his mind was too sternly fixed upon one serious end for him to see things as onlookers saw them, or in their true proportion.

Nevertheless, the least sympathetic of his audience could hardly see him on the platform and not be impressed by his wonderful personality; he looked the man he was, powerfully built, thickset, stalwart and sturdy, without any swagger, but with the air of a conqueror as he stood up to speak; an open face of fresh complexion, unshaven and rather rugged beard; his hair, grizzled and curly, upstanding like a mane from his broad forehead in a way that gave him the look of a lion; good grey eyes which could twinkle with merriment, light up with enthusiasm, or flash with indignation; a voice that deepened as he spoke; action and speech so sudden, it seemed it must be spontaneous.

To see him was to know him for a rebel born. He was inclined, at times at all events, to divide men into two classes, flunkies and rebels; and he was not content to be a rebel himself, but professed his desire to stir up rebellion in others against what to him was intolerable. The law? What law? Who made it law? Conformity, to him, was slavery. He would follow no custom. Usage? that was a reason for not doing likewise. His behaviour



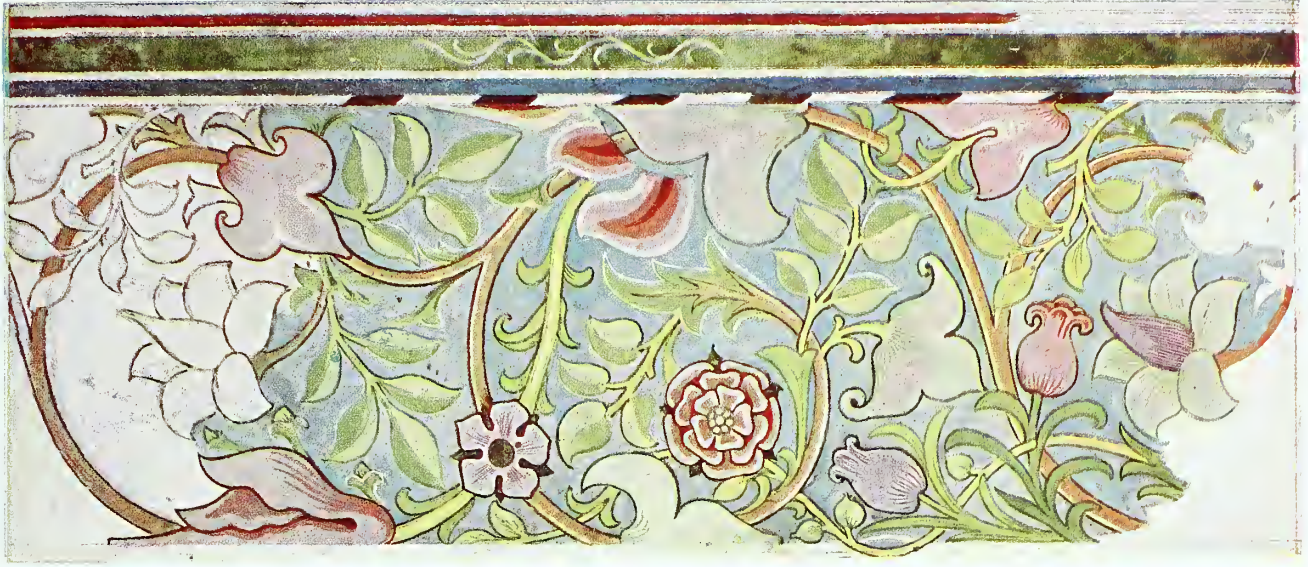
HELIOPHONE.

Axminster Carpet—1873.



"Anemone" Pattern—Silk and Wool Curtain Material—1874.

Working Drawings by William Morris.



Painted Wall Decoration—ca. 1877.



Honeysuckle
pattern printed
on Linen
(p. 20).
Working
drawing by
William Morris.
1893.

"The Strawberry Thief" pattern. Cotton print (p. 20). Working drawing by William Morris, 1883.



sition, at the hint of some new work to do; *to do*—that was it—accomplished, it was done and ended.

Mr. Ellis has put it on record that Morris was less satisfied with his achievement in stained glass than in any other branch of his work. That seems, at first thought, hard to explain, when we remember the splendid colour of his glass, for which, even when Burne-Jones designed the cartoons, he was invariably responsible. Perhaps he cared less for the work because it was not all his own, perhaps because for a long while the technique of glass painting had the better of him. He mastered it at last; but he had never the

was individualistic, absolutely; he dressed, spoke, did, as pleased himself, and had nothing but contempt for orthodoxy of whatever kind. And with all this he was a socialist, and a militant one, convinced that he saw in socialism a way out of the degradation unto which society, and modern art and workmanship accordingly, had fallen. He never seemed to suspect that socialism (as understood by his political brethren) would leave less room than ever for the free action of a man—of a man, that is to say, as distinguished from a sheep!

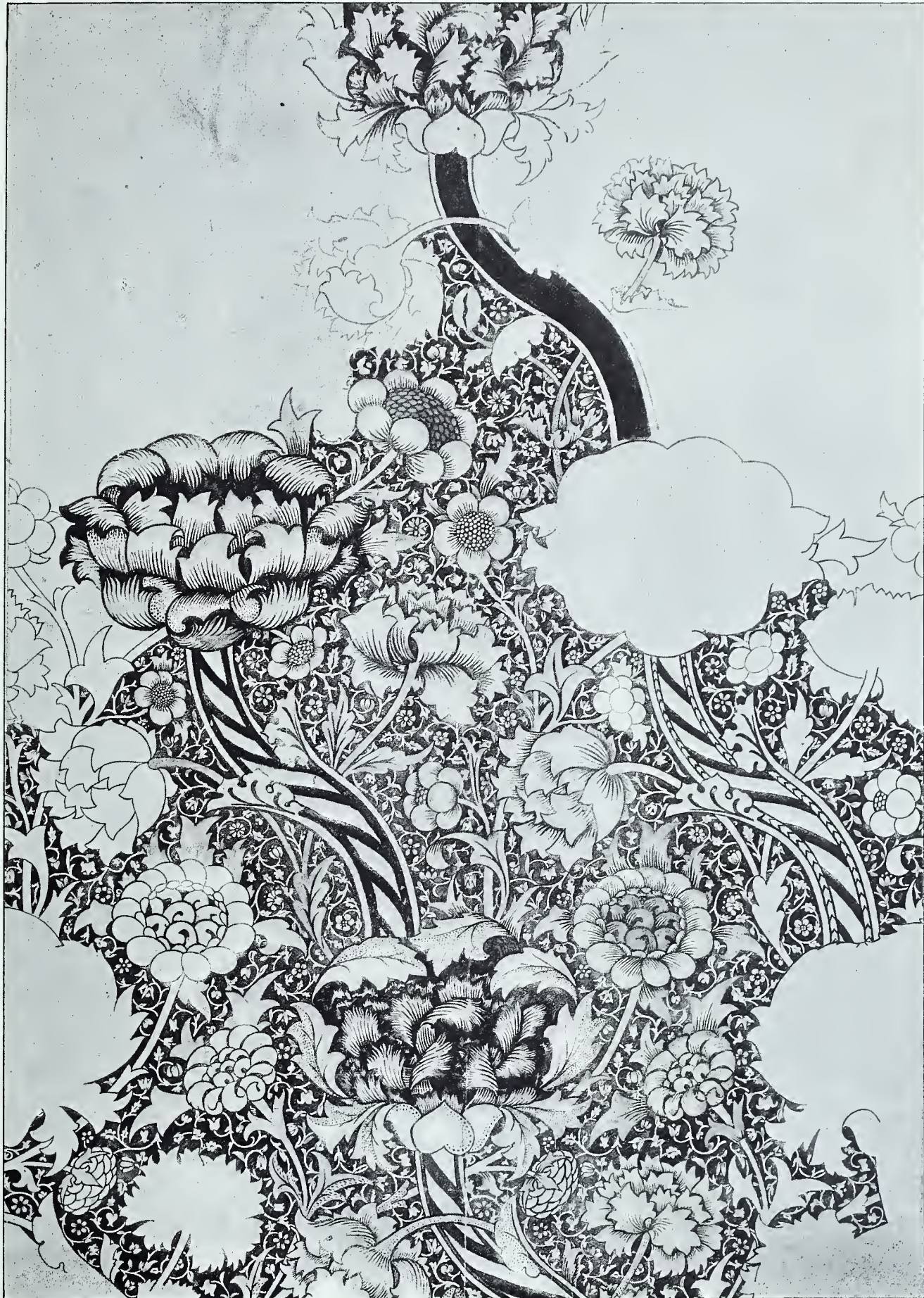
Some stress is here laid upon Morris's socialism because it so greatly influenced his art. He would not, for the worker's sake, have made things by machinery even had he found it serviceable to art; he hated and distrusted it too much to make the best of it, or, for that matter, of science. He produced things which are indeed a happiness to the user, and were a happiness to the maker—if he was an artist (which not all workmen are), and things which were made by the people: that they were made for the people can hardly be contended, since it is not possible for any but the very few to pay the price for handwork in these days.

Employing, as he did, handwork, or the simplest and most primitive of mechanical aids to handwork, he was free to design as it pleased him. That suited him best. The fight then was between him and the material; and he was a fighter by instinct, never so happy as in the thick of the strife. I have heard him say he liked being heckled; and he looked like it: he was at home on the platform. And in art, it was as much as anything the fight which interested him, the pleasure of attacking a problem, the joy of solving it.

In that way his career explains itself. The mystery of his wonderful versatility is cleared up. It was wonderful indeed, but it was not versatility—rather the reverse, steadfastness in one progressive purpose. He did not veer about, but moved straight on in quick steps, each step a craft. Impatient, he plunged into work and fought his way through. Once he had mastered it, he ceased to be passionately interested in it; but, though his ardour was assuaged, it had not burnt itself out. At the first contact with some new difficulty it burst out anew, fiery as ever, to be quenched only by accomplishment. No! not quenched, but smothered, presently to flare up at the breath of some fresh oppo-



"Brer Rabbit" pattern. Cotton print (p. 20). Working drawing by William Morris, 1883.



The "Wandle"
pattern.
Printed Cotton
(p. 20).
Working drawing
by William
Morris.
1884.

"Fritillary" pattern Wall-paper (p. 21). Working drawing by William Morris. 1885.



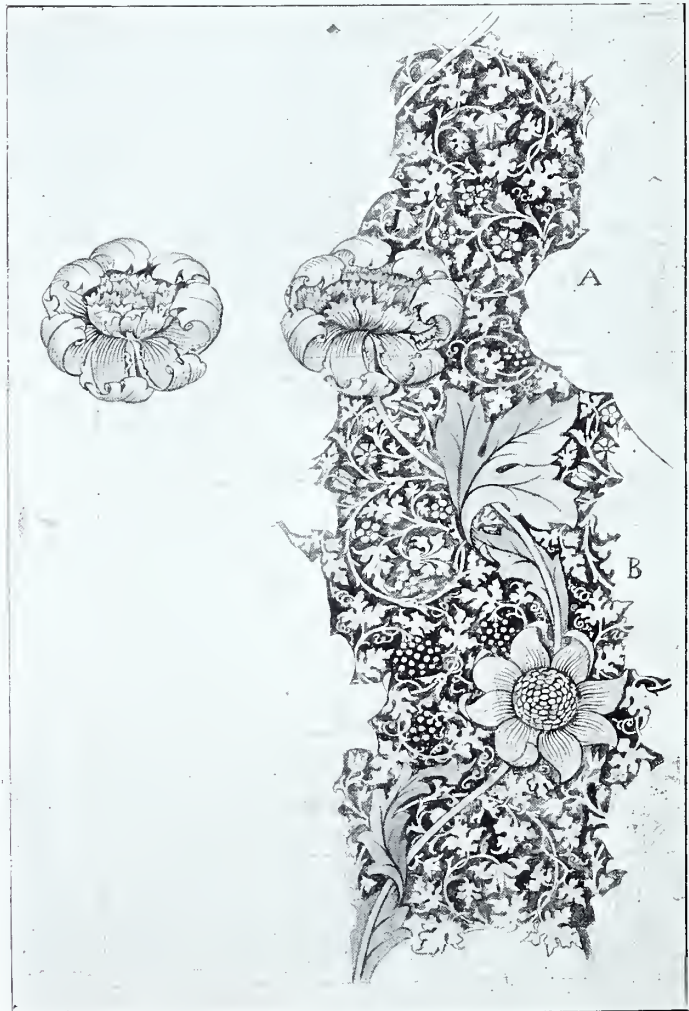
triumphant sense of having carried it to the very furthest point. In the technique of glass painting he had something to learn from men like Mr. John Clayton, who were before him in the field. His was not the temperament patiently to study the chemistry of glass colour; or to prove by long experiment the dependence to be placed upon a flux. The disappointments of the kiln were of a kind he was least of the temper to bear; and at one time (a scruple as to the right of putting new windows into old churches aiding), he nearly gave up glass painting altogether—fighting is not such fun when you don't win—and turned his thoughts to processes which he could more easily overcome. This was the only one which seemed to baffle him for long; the rest he mastered and passed on—only to seek new trades to conquer.

And this progressiveness of his activity accounts for the continual renewal of his energy. He never worked on at what tired him, as craftsmen and producers less happily placed are bound to do, but turned to something in which he could take pleasure; hence the spontaneity of his design; it was done rapidly, at a white heat, and the warmth remains in it. Working from impulse, never from outward pressure (to which he had no occasion to yield),

he did the thing he was moved to do, and did it in the way it came to him to do it. He did not ask himself, is this thing in demand? he did not stop to think if anyone wanted it; but took it for granted that what he had to give would be acceptable, and gave it with all the confidence of his perpetual youth.

He passed on the sooner from one trade to another because he was satisfied always by the simplest effects, and preferred to produce them by the simplest means. The simple thing was the natural thing to do, and the workmanlike, as well as being a protest against the ultra-elaboration and false finish which is called refinement. It was not difficult for a man of his capacity to master, for example, the processes of old-fashioned dyeing, or of cotton printing by hand-blocks. If he had entered into the wider, the never-ending, fields of chemical dyeing and complicated roller printing, he might have worked on in them to the end of his days without satisfactory results. Happily for him, he abhorred machine-printing, and chemically-produced dyestuffs.

It was not in his nature to linger over a trade, to think how he could carry it a little further towards perfection; he did not want perfection, did not care for it. Mr. Ellis, from whose closely sympathetic paper I have so often quoted, tells us that the French proverb, "The better is the enemy of the good," was constantly on his lips. Furbishing was not in his way; he wanted more substantial work to do, something on which he could employ all his might—and he was a mighty worker. He said himself that if he were unable to work, he would die of weariness and despair. He would a thousand



"Kennett" pattern Chintz (p. 20). Working drawing by William Morris. Ca. 1889.



Window at
Christchurch,
Oxford (p. 25).
Ornament by
William Morris.
Figures by Sir
E. Burne-Jones.
From the glass
executed by
Morris and Co.

times rather have died, as he did, before his time, but with his hands full of work, than linger a helpless on-looker upon life.

He had not the patience to stand by. And his impatience was deliberate and wilful. He valued impulse more highly than any accomplishment; he did not care for polish; rudeness did not offend him. "I suspect I like things rougher than most men," he once said; and when someone complained of Dickens that he was not a gentleman, his quick retort was, "So much the better!" He makes clear to us the impatience of his temperament in those lines of his on Death:—

"Will it not be soft and kind,
That rest from life, from *pa-*
tience, and from pain,
That rest from bliss we know
not when we find,
That rest from Love that ne'er
the end can gain?"

The restlessness of life, the gnawing of pain, the emptiness of happiness, the impotence of Love—these are the common property of the poets, but patience hitherto has been identified with rest.

His characteristic combativeness, and its relation to his work, are exemplified in the way he set about the various arts and crafts he took up: he did not learn a trade in the natural way from those who knew it, and seek then to better the teaching of his masters; but, acknowledging no master, except perhaps the ancients, he would worry it out always for himself. He had a wonderful knack of learning in that way. It is a pity if his example should mislead (as it seems to be doing) the younger generation of designers. He succeeded; but who knows how much time he wasted by re-inventing, as it were, what others could have told him? His brilliant achievement seems to have encouraged the illusion, lying usually at the bottom of a man's self-consciousness, that everything depends only upon the individual and what is innate in him—genius in our case, of course—that accumulated experience counts for nothing, and education does no good. It is of the essence of amateurishness to think you can do without learning your trade, or that you can somehow worry through. Morris came out with flying colours only because he happened to be endowed as only one man in a century is likely to be. There are many ways to success; but, as a method of proceeding, his was emphatically the most unlikely

way—except for Morris. No doubt there is a charm always about experimental work, but it is a charm more highly prized by the artist than by the purchaser of it, who is perhaps the loser by its half-success.

Morris had not only an immense capacity for work, but was himself a master workman, doing always what he meant to do, and doing it about as well as it could be done. "Delight in skill," he said, "lies at the root of all art." It was because he liked it just so, that he would violate what some of us accept as laws binding

on the designer, as when he made an acorn grow from two stalks, or gave a lily five petals, or when he cut a scroll abruptly short at the margin of the panel instead of designing it in the orthodox way within the space he had to fill. In this the brusquer side of his nature showed itself, as it was apt to do in his work; but in spite of it his art was essentially ornamental. "All real art is ornamental," was a dictum of his; and his own art was essentially beautiful. For his artistic ideal was beauty. The words which Browning put into the mouth of Fra Lippo Lippi, would have come as properly from his lips:

"If you get simple beauty
and nought else,
You get about the best
thing God invents."

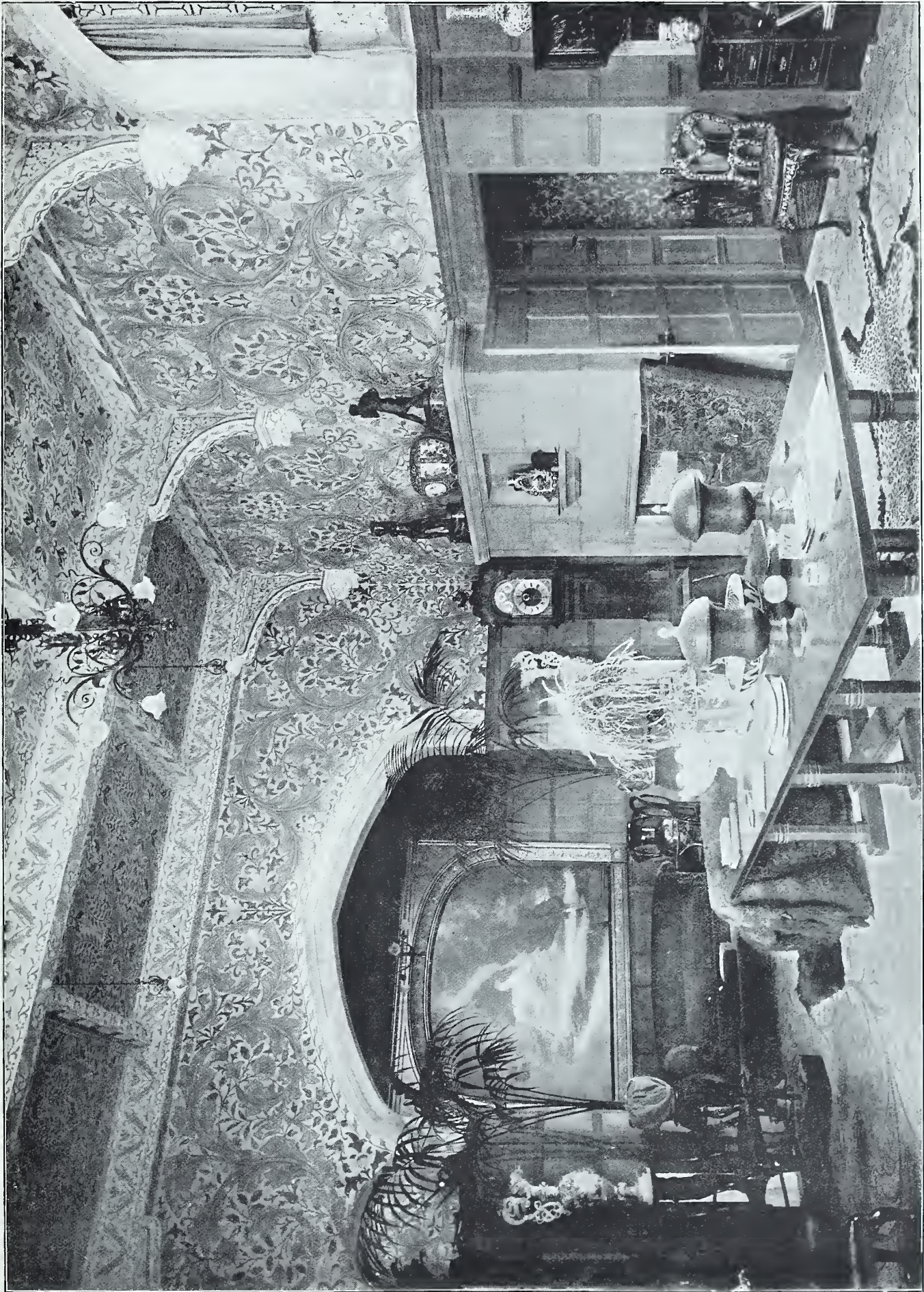
An artist is bound to think it one of the best at all events, most of all the artist in ornament. Certainly Morris thought so, and all his striving was in that direction, his very socialism, as has been said, being an aspiration towards the beautiful life. The beauty of his design was preserved from anything like sickly sweetness by a certain ruggedness of treatment. There is much talk nowadays about healthy realism: Morris was an abso-

lutely healthy idealist. Aesthetic he might be called; but there is nothing faint about the atmosphere of his art, nothing of the unwholesomeness which neurotic persons would have us believe proper to the century-end.

As to his preaching on art, it is like a breath of fresh air always; in fact there is a bracing quality about his speech which made it too keen for some—constitutions less than robust could not stand it. In his case the natural man was not absorbed in the artist. He loved beauty indeed, believed in it and in its humanising influence, and cordially hated the puritanism which made for barren ugliness; but he loved nature more, to



Detail of painted decoration (p. 27). Working drawing by William Morris.



Interior
at
Stanmore Hall
(p. 27).
Decorated by
Morris and Co.
from designs by
William Morris.

Lily and Pomegranate pattern
Wall-paper
(p. 21).
Working
drawing by
William Morris.
1887.





HELIOCHROME.

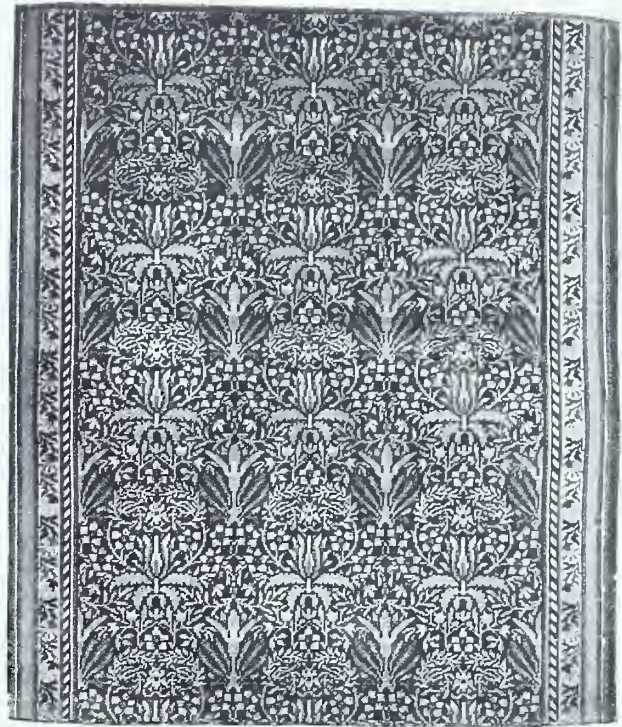
“THE VISION OF THE HOLY GRAIL.”

Coloured Drawing by H. Dearle, for Tapestry executed by Morris & Co. for W. K. D’Arcy, Esq.

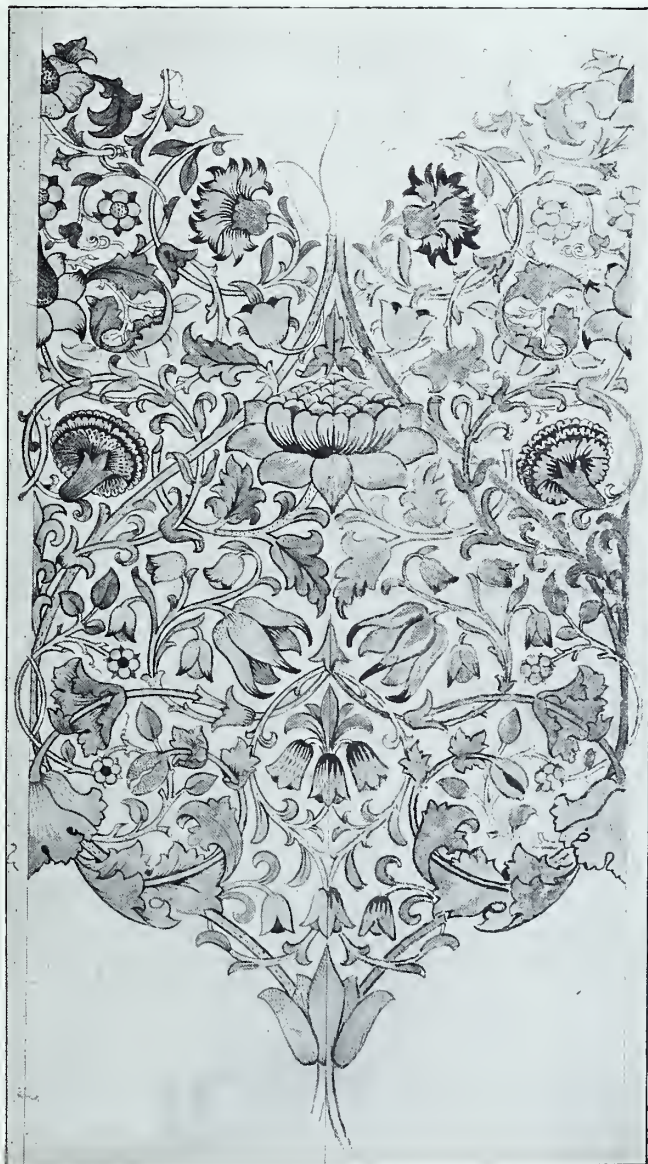
Figures designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. 1891.

the extent, that is to say, even of sacrificing artistic considerations to it, if need were. He was of those who allow themselves to be led at times along the path of naturalism, no matter what the artistic consequences. For he had more delight in design reminding him of the woods, the fields, the cottage garden, than in any triumph of craftsmanship. These are his own words:—"Beauty mingled with invention, founded on the observation of nature, is the mainspring of decorative design. If it is not beautiful it has no right to exist; if it is not invention it becomes wearisome; if it is not founded on observation of nature it can hardly be either beautiful or inventive. It is apt to become merely strange and monstrous when it departs far from nature." And again:—"I have said that it is good and reasonable for us to ask for obviously natural flowers in embroidery; one might have said the same about all ornamental work, and further, that those natural forms which are at once familiar and most delightful to us, as well from association as from beauty, are the best for our purpose." This is not very wide of Ruskin's doctrine, that the most familiar in nature is the most natural, and the most natural the most beautiful in ornament.

Morris, it is true, admitted in so many words, that in surface decoration it was not necessary to tell a story, and that "you may have decoration, as in some Arab art,



Lily pattern.
"Wilton pile"
stair-carpet
(p. 22).
Designed by
William Morris
Ca. 1881.



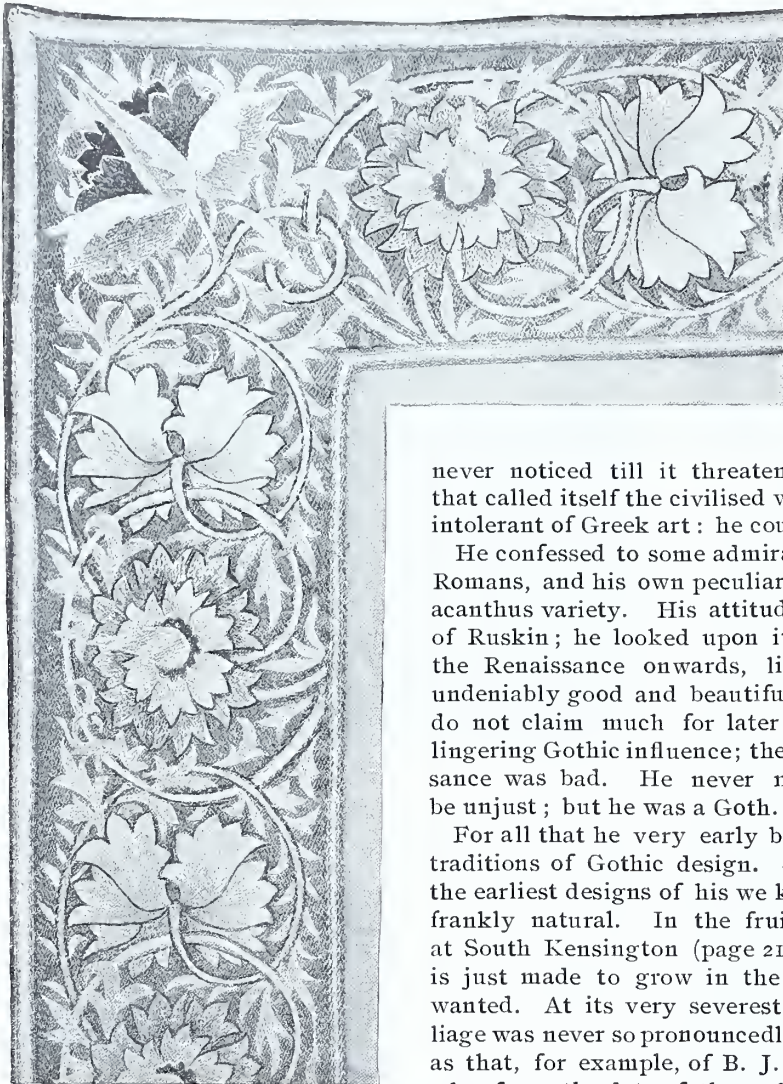
Loddon pattern
printed Cotton
(p. 20).
Working draw-
ing by William
Morris.
Ca. 1884.

which simply aims at pleasing the eye by the repetition of certain arrangements of lines, spaces, and colours that do not recall to the mind any forms or events of nature," but he did not care himself for that kind of ornament. "No schools of art," he says—rather without his book—"have ever been contented to use abstract lines and forms and colours—that is, lines, &c., without any meaning." He allows, however, that "the more intractable the material is, the less we should attempt direct imitation of nature; yet, on the other hand, the more beautiful in themselves the lines of the design should be, and the design the more thoughtful and inventive." That is spoken like an ornamentist; but, in the main, he thought abstract ornament—that is, pattern pure and simple, not reminding him of nature—something "outlandish." Perhaps it is—and more's the pity! It would be a stout form of patriotism which should contend that it was necessarily the worse for that.

We need not mourn the narrowness of Morris. There is strength in concentration: and the intensity of his conviction was at the root of his success. He himself believed in narrowness, and had some scorn for any one whose love of art was more diffuse than his. He used to say, he had rather a man did not appreciate many and various forms of art, suspecting him probably, if he did, of not loving any one of them truly. Catholicity was obnoxious to his temperament. He was not by nature critically inclined, if we assume criticism to imply weighing and soberly judging. What he did not like he disliked; that was all, and there was an end of it. Once when we were acting as judges together, I suggested that our personal feeling ought not to count for too much, and said that our disliking a thing did not make it bad. "Oh, don't it though," he answered; "what we don't like *is* bad."

Greek art was quite beyond his sympathy; "he was not blind to its limitations," is the way it has been put. Surely the limitations were his. His coldness towards Greek ornament (which he found so cold) might be accounted for, perhaps, by the absence in it of natural forms; but, as it happens, he denied "decorative

Poppy pattern.
Embroidery
(p. 25).
Designed by
William Morris.
1875.



instinct" to the Japanese, whose art errs on the side of the naturalistic. True, it was also "blankly individualistic." The solution of the matter is probably to be found in the fact that the qualities of refinement characteristic of Greek art were just those he could best spare. And then, there was so much subordination in it, and he was an insubordinate; moreover, it was not art of the people nor yet for them. There was the rub. "The whole art of the classical ancients, while it was alive and growing, was the art of a society made up of a narrow aristocracy of citizens, waited upon by a large body of slaves, and surrounded by a world of barbarism, which was always despised, and

never noticed till it threatened to overwhelm the self-sufficient aristocracy that called itself the civilised world." That was enough to make William Morris intolerant of Greek art: he could not and would not like it.

He confessed to some admiration for the mosaic pavement patterns of the Romans, and his own peculiar scroll was not remotely related to the familiar acanthus variety. His attitude towards the Renaissance was very much that of Ruskin; he looked upon it as "a period of blight." "From the time of the Renaissance onwards, life, growth, and hope are gone." What was undeniably good and beautiful in early Renaissance art (its sincerest admirers do not claim much for later Renaissance design) he placidly attributed to lingering Gothic influence; the bad in it was of the Renaissance, and the Renaissance was bad. He never meant to be unjust; but he was a Goth.

For all that he very early broke the traditions of Gothic design. Some of the earliest designs of his we know are frankly natural. In the fruit panels at South Kensington (page 21) nature is just made to grow in the way he wanted. At its very severest, his foliage was never so pronouncedly Gothic as that, for example, of B. J. Talbert, who, from the date of the publication of his book in 1867 to the time of his

death in 1881, was perhaps more than Morris the model upon whom the designers of the period founded themselves. A comparatively early instance of Morris's more naturalistic manner occurs in the "Vine" wall-paper (page 2) sufficiently removed from nature by the artful distribution of the alternating patches of leafage, and by the artificial lines of the "boldly circular" vine stocks.

He could be more severe, Byzantine indeed in his severity (page 4), but, throughout, his work is based on nature, more or less under restraint, as the occasion might demand, but always there. His silks show influence of Sicilian and early Italian design; from the time of his interest in carpets, we note the influence, even in his wall-papers and cottons, of Persian forms—notably in the use of the "inhabited leaf," as he very prettily called it; but he was always very much himself, and, moreover, thoroughly English. By the way, he was something of a stay-at-home, not much given to foreign travel and never seriously swayed by foreign art, though in the later form of his scroll, as in the "Bachelor's Button" (page 30), one may trace the influence of the illuminated choir-books at Siena. It would be far-fetched perhaps to see in the intricate interlacings of his initial letter and the like, something of Scandinavian or Icelandic influence.

It was his opinion that "ornamental pattern-work, to be raised above the contempt of reasonable men, must possess three qualities—beauty, imagination, and order." It followed that he was for conventional treatment—with the proviso that the convention must be the artist's own—otherwise, he thought, you had almost better just copy nature; you would not produce ornament that way, but you might learn something in the process of copying. For the rest he subscribed to the axiom that, other things being equal, the more mechanical the process, the less direct should be the imitation of natural forms. Unfitness in ornament was to him an offence against nature. "What we call decoration is, in many cases, but



Artichoke pattern. Embroidery (p. 21). Working drawing by William Morris. Presented by Mrs. Morris to South Kensington Museum.

a device or way we have learned for making necessary things reasonable as well as pleasant to us. The pattern becomes a part of the thing we make, its exponent, or mode of expressing itself to us; and by it we often form our opinions, not only of the shape, but of the strength and uses of a thing."

He preferred pattern which did not hide its structure; much ingenuity, he thought, was wasted in masking the constructional lines of design; they gave largeness and nobility to it; and "the obvious presence of geometric order" prevented the effect of restlessness.

Above all things he disliked vagueness. "Run any risk of failure rather than involve yourself in a tangle of poor, weak lines that people can't make out. Definite form bounded by firm outline is a necessity for all ornament. You ought always to go for positive patterns when they may be had." Personally, he was no more inclined to over intricate patterns than to metrical gymnastics; it was natural to him to plan "frank" patterns; but it was part of his romance to love mystery—and that he got by interweaving two or more separate growths (pages 2 and 24, etc.) into one pattern. He showed his art in doing this without losing, as it were, the thread of the design—which, in the coloured stuffs or what not, was easier to follow than in the rendering of them here in black and white. His floral growth was not seldom entwined with his favourite scroll, readily distinguished always by the contrast of its conventionality with relatively natural plant forms.

Frank colour also he insisted upon always. It was the sign, according to him, of a "right-minded" colourist to make his work as bright as possible, and as "full of colour" as he could get it, and if he did not get it "pure and clear," he had not learnt the trade. To have a prejudice against any particular colour he took to be indicative of "disease" in an artist. But he himself found yellow "not a colour that can be used in masses," red a "difficult" one, and purple a colour "no one in his senses would think of using in bright masses."

Green, on the other hand, he described as being "so useful, and so restful to the eyes, that in this matter also we are bound to follow Nature, and make large use of that work-a-day colour." Most of all he loved blue, the "holiday" colour, as he calls it by way of distinction from "work-a-day green." In small masses he found all colours useful except muddy or dirty ones, which he could not endure. He was against all rules of colour. His experience taught him "the paler the colour is, the purer it may be." Pale, pure colour he found "the best tone for wall-papers, or flat painted ornament"; the richer



Tile Panel (p. 27). Designed by William Morris, and executed by William de Morgan. 1876.



Evethorn pattern. Enamelled tiles (p. 27). Designed by Mrs. Faulkner for Morris & Co. 1885.



Roll pattern. Painted tiles (p. 27). Designed by William Morris. 1870.



Artichoke pattern. Painted tiles (p. 27). Designed by William Morris. Ca. 1870.



"Bough" pattern. Painted tiles (p. 27). Designed by William Morris. Ca. 1870.

The Green Dining-room at South Kensington Museum (p. 25). Decoration designed by William Morris. The figures in stained glass designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones.



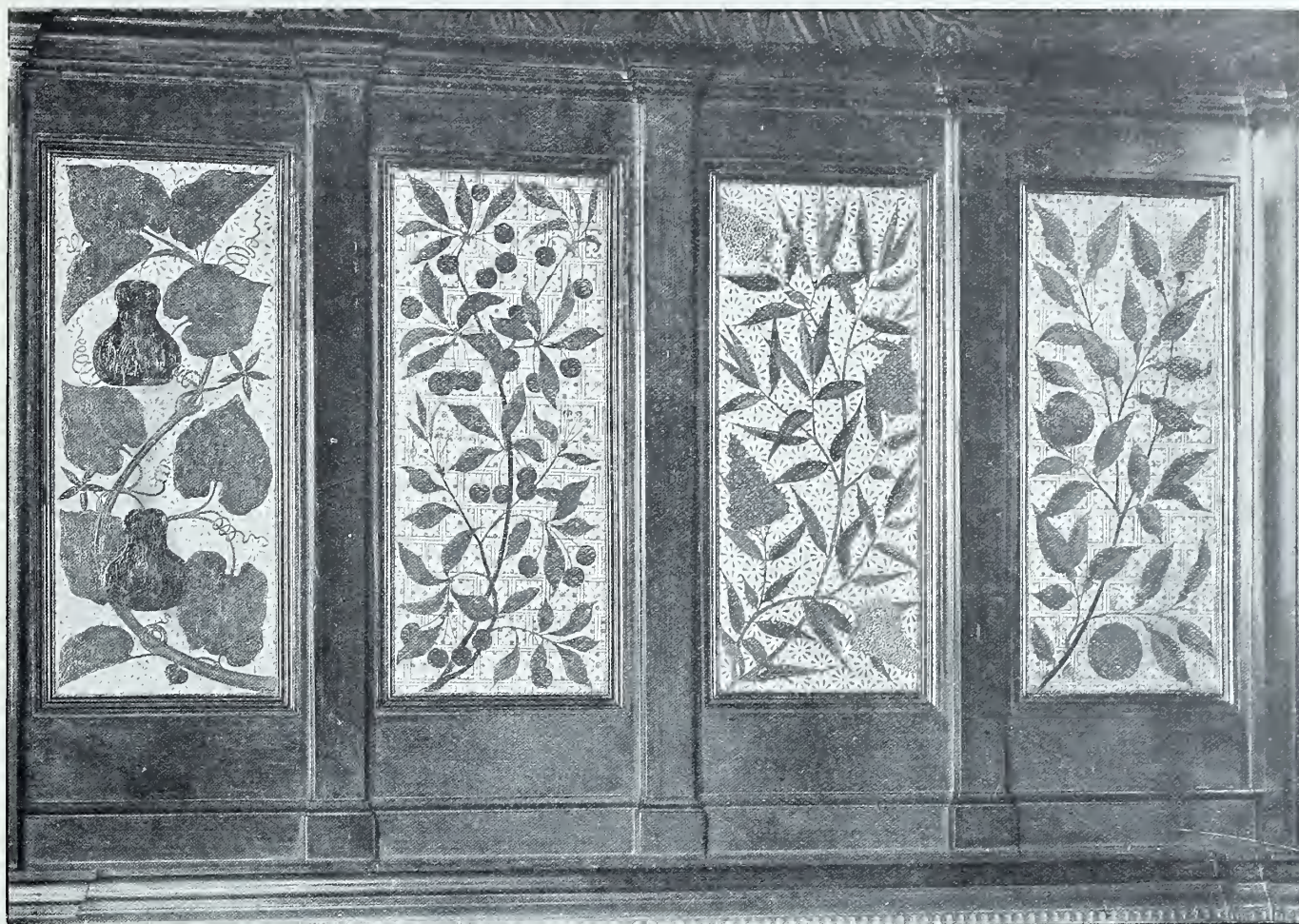
and deeper colours he preferred to keep for rich materials, or for small and confined spaces; but he was too good a colourist to attempt to explain what can only be felt.

His colour schemes were not the result of theory. They came out of the crafts in which he was engaged. Combinations which we attribute to his individuality are often, strictly speaking, not so much his choice as what the conditions imposed upon him: he was master enough to obey the dictates of technique. Thus, given his hatred of dyes derived from coal-tar or other chemical substances, it was almost a matter of compulsion that he should use for his cotton printing the blue of indigo or woad, the red of madder, the yellow of weld or Persian berry, the brown of walnut juice (getting his green and purple and black by combinations of these) and so work practically with the chintz-palette of the early Oriental cotton printers, which he certainly revived. He could no more have got out of his block-printing in vegetable dyes, the effects obtained by roller-printing in what he called "chemical dyes," than the commercial printer can get by machine-printing a range of pure, fresh colours. He was wrong in his contention that the dyes due to modern science are more fugitive than vegetable dyes. That may have been true when he began to find fault with them; but it is true no longer. He was right, however, as to the pleasant fading of his favourite stains: "They

are not eternal; the sun, in lighting them and beautifying them, consumes them, yet gradually and for the most part kindly." He followed his artistic sense in having nothing to do with the colours of which he did not see his way to make use. As to making the best of the colours most readily available (and sure to be used by the many), that was a problem which did not provoke his attack. It is one, however, that is nearer solution today than it was when Morris first took to the dye vat. His own designs for cotton prints, etc., are rather fully illustrated on pages 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 25, 31, and on Plate IV. (opposite page 24).

A cotton print he conceived as something gay, something made up of "the naivest flowers (and birds, too, or animals), with which you may do anything that is not ugly." He would tell designers they could not well go wrong so long as they avoided commonplace and kept "somewhat on the daylight side of nightmare." The spooks and ghouls haunting a certain form of "up-to-date" design he could not endure.

Without insisting upon a hard flat treatment of surface design he objected to all simulation of modelling, protesting that shading should never be employed with the purpose of making an object look round, but that "whatever shading you use should be used for explanation only, to show what you mean by such and such a piece of drawing; and even that you had better



Details of
Painted Decoration at South
Kensington
(pp. 18 and 27).
Designed by
William Morris.
1866.

be sparing of." Recognising that cotton printing gave occasion for "hatching and dotting," he used eventually, both for cotton and wall-paper printing, a system of enrichment by means of dotting, which greatly enhanced the otherwise flat colour of the printer. This was a device arising really out of the old-fashioned method by which brass pins are driven into a wooden block, to print-off as dots, and was employed early in this century by cotton printers, who used what was called a "pinning roller," a hand-roller which Morris himself would not have despised.

It would be interesting to show the plans on which Morris designed his surface patterns, but space does not allow it: they may be traced by the curious in such matters in the patterns herein illustrated, which are arranged as nearly as can be in the order of their production, so as to show as far as possible the course of his artistic development. He does not seem ever to have designed a "drop" repeat, preferring, characteristically, the more obvious lines of construction.

In the design for wall-papers, to be stretched out flat on the wall, and about which there was no special beauty of execution, he allowed that the designer might be "driven" to do more than he otherwise would in the way of masking the construction of his pattern; but he was never at the pains to do much in that way himself, not being of those who are easily driven. He spoke habitually of wall-paper as a "makeshift"; and would rather always have used for wall-hangings, silks or other textiles—the sanitarians notwithstanding. For all that, he was not satisfied with mere pattern, even in a paper. "Is it not better," he

said, "to be reminded, however simply, of the close vine trellis that keeps out the sun by the Nile side, or of the wild woods and their streams with the dogs panting beside them; or of the swallows sweeping above the garden boughs towards the house eaves where their nestlings are, while the sun breaks the clouds on them; or of the many-flowered summer meadows of Picardy?" Perhaps it is. At all events it sounds inviting, as he words it. But his question might be answered by another: does anyone really get that sort of enjoyment out of the paper he lives with? It may reasonably be contended that the more important thing for the artist to remember is that it is only a background he is designing. He spoke more as a poet than as a practical designer when he protested, as he did, that the decoration which did not remind one of something beyond itself was futile; and it strikes one as rather odd that though he must have meaning in his wall-papers, he did not want it in the ornament of his books; odder still that, not content with abstract ornament there, he must have natural forms bearing no relation to the text. The character of his wall-paper designs is to be seen on pages 2, 12, 16, 24, 25, 26, and Plate IV. (opposite page 24).

When it came to designs for weaving, he considered dots and suchlike, which were all very well to enrich poor materials, quite beneath the dignity of silk or wool. There the web was worth showing, and his native honesty led him to prefer a broad pattern which compelled the use of good stuff. You need only look at his designs on page 5, to see that he was a devout admirer of old Sicilian and Palermitan patterns. The simplicity of their lines (they were manifestly weavers'

Painted Wall
Decoration.
Side of window
recess at Swan
House, Chelsea
(p. 27).
Designed by
William Morris.
1881.



patterns), no less than the rich invention shown in them (they were brimful of symbolism), appealed strongly to him, and it is obvious that in his silks he to some extent founded himself upon them. In the coarse woollen hanging on page 4, he seems to have gone back to Byzantium for inspiration, adopting the early weaver's barbaric but effective trick of shooting colours across the curtain in bands, with only half regard to the forms of the design. This was designed for heavy curtains and for use as wall hangings in churches and the like. It was hung in his own room to within a couple of feet of the ceiling, almost flat, with only just enough undulation of the surface to break the evenness of the pattern. The manliness of a pattern like this helps us to understand how it was he could see no redeeming feature in the brocades of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There was nothing to be learnt from such "meaningless tormenting of the web" but a warning; and, again, they represented "the drudgery of the operative," as opposed to the free work of the mediæval craftsman. But for that, he must have recognised often very beautiful colour in the work even of the "vile Pompadour period."

With carpets he began modestly, by designing cheap Kidderminster, Brussels, Wilton pile (pages 3, 17), and patent Axminster (Plate II., opposite page 8), machine-made varieties all, not produced in his own workshops, but woven for him. But apart from the objection that these were machine-made, the conditions of the loom were irksome to him as a designer; he did not like being restrained; and, the beauty of the old Oriental carpets imported into this

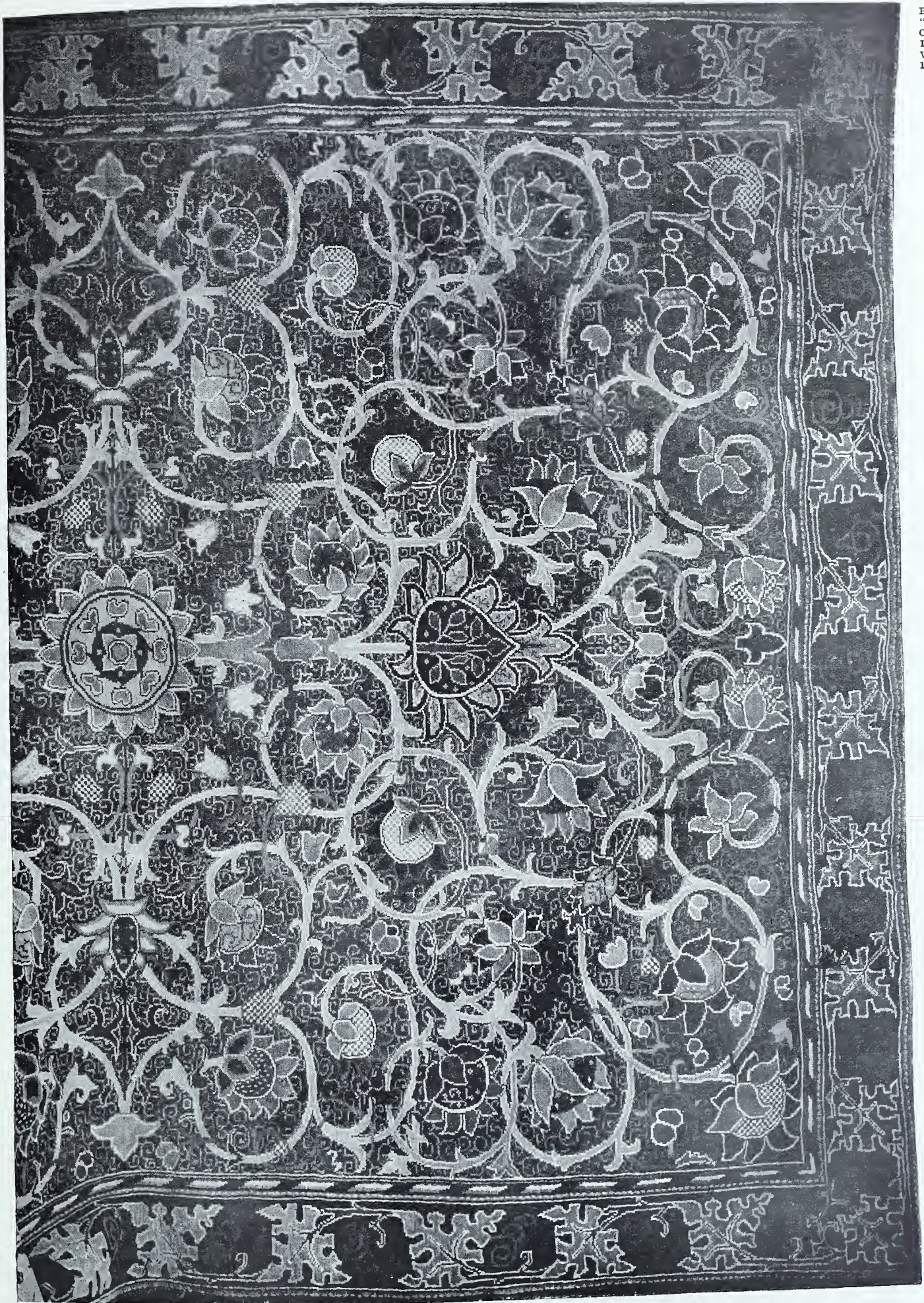
country inciting him, he eventually set about weaving "real" Axminster, *i.e.*, carpets of soft close pile, all in one piece, after the Eastern fashion. These were at first woven at Hammersmith, whence the name "Hammersmith carpets," but were afterwards made at Merton Abbey. The process is pictured on the first page of this number, as it is still carried on by Mr. Morris's partners and successors—who are not merely still executing his designs, but are vigorously carrying on the traditions he established. Carpet weaving of this description he himself describes as a "mosaic" of small, woollen squares; the

THUS ENDETH THE STORY OF THE
MEN OF THORSNESS, THE DWELLERS
AT EYR, AND THOSE WHO
DWELT BY SWANFIRTH.

Last words of
"Story of the
Dwellers at
Eyr" (p. 28).
Written
by William
Morris. 1871.
By permission
of Lady
Burne-Jones.



Detail of
Painted Decor-
ation (p. 27).
Working
drawing by
William Morris



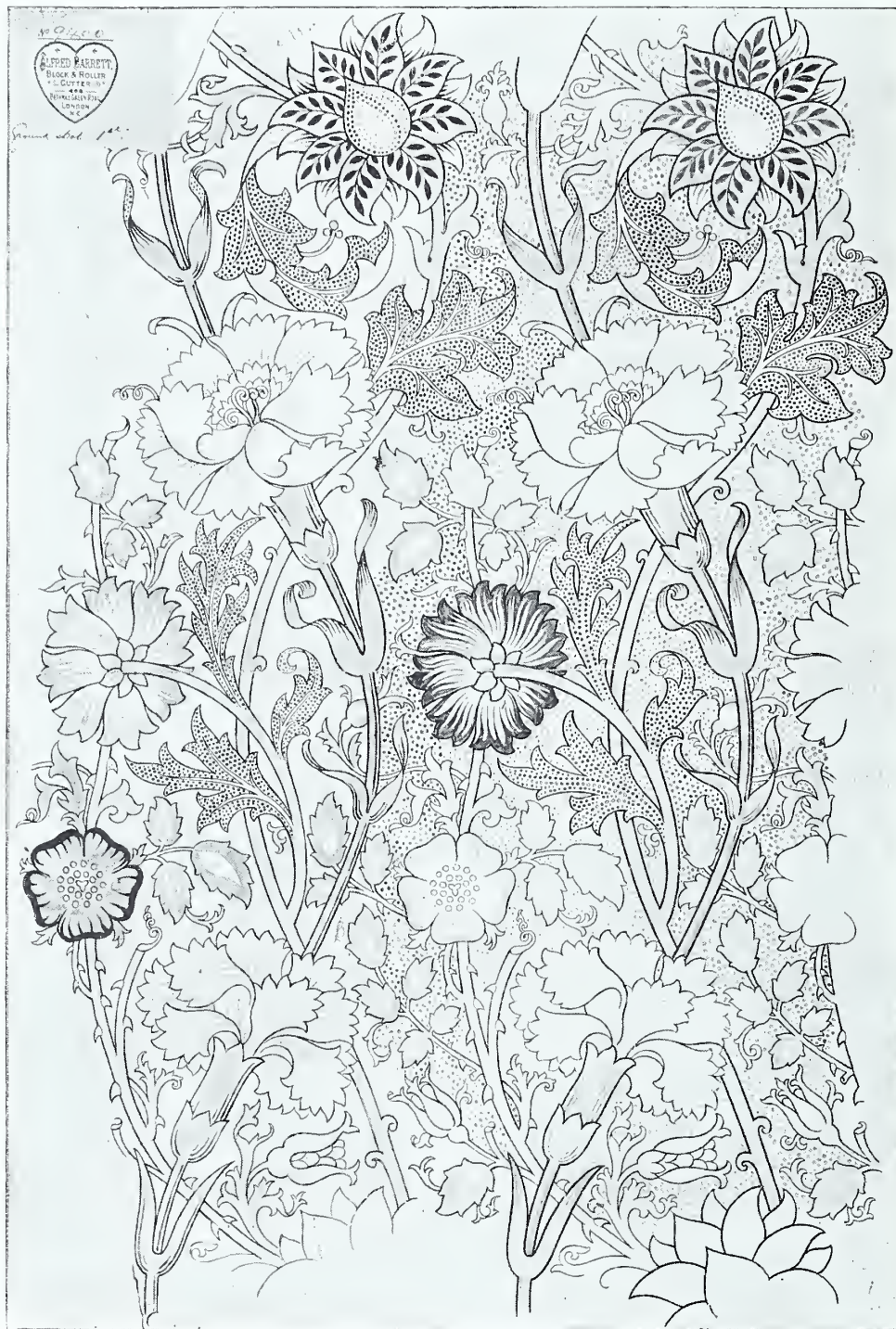
Portion of a
"Hammersmith
Carpet" (p. 24).
Designed by
William Morris.
1883.

designer has only to observe the size of the squares, and he is free to let his fancy spread itself over the carpet. Morris naturally found this kind of thing less difficult than working within the lines given by narrow strips of machine-made material. He founded himself very deliberately upon Persian models, adopting from the East the very doubtful practice of introducing animal forms, which were as likely as not to be seen upside down on the floor; but he produced beautiful carpets, very much his own. The illustration on page 23, lacking colour, does scant justice to his work. He did not approve of the gradation of tint so much sought after in modern carpets, preferring a pattern which lay "absolutely flat upon the ground"; and he contrived to get wonderful variety and beauty of tint by juxtaposition of contrasting colours (red and blue by preference), bounded by judiciously chosen outlines. A carpet, he held, should be not only a passable but an exquisite piece of colour. And, of course, it should have something to say for itself. Such was his appreciation of Oriental carpet weaving, that he half doubted whether we had any business to make a carpet in the West. He knew we were not in the least likely to beat Persian work in the matter of colour, and so thought we were bound "to get enough of form and meaning into it to justify our making it at all."

Tapestry was but a step beyond carpet weaving as Morris understood it. His tapestry is made on the *haute lisse*, worked, that is to say, on the warp standing upright in front of the weaver, who has only to hold apart the threads with his left hand whilst he works his bobbins in and out amongst them, and so builds up his coloured woollen picture, a sort of embroidery with the shuttle upon stretched threads. The *basse-lisse* or *low-warp* loom, so contrived that the warp threads lie horizontally over the cartoon below, he held in small respect, as a cheap and relatively mechanical time-saving contrivance, which did a good deal to degrade the noble art of tapestry weaving, and cause it to be neglected.

Morris ranked tapestry as "the noblest of the weaving arts" because there was nothing mechanical about it, next to mosaic the most lasting form of decoration, and

next to painting the most desirable. The Merton tapestries have more the quality of old Arras than any other modern work. What is pictorial in them is the picture of Sir E. Burne-Jones, which is always decorative. They owe much of their beauty to the figure work, but, harmonious as that is with Morris's own work, it cannot quite be said that the effect



Pink and Rose pattern Wall-paper (p. 21). Working drawing by William Morris, 1891.

is always absolutely one. This would not be surprising in the work of two separate men (friends though they were), except for the fact that Morris was responsible, not only for the details, such as the "verdure" diapering and so on, but for the colour of the figures also; Sir E. Burne-Jones's designs were made, if not in monochrome, in a sort of tinting of his own not related to the effect sought in the tapestry.

The qualities sought in the Merton tapestries are purity



"African Marigold" Pattern—Cotton Print—ca. 1874.



"Acanthus" Pattern—Wall Paper—ca. 1873.



"Pimpernel" Pattern—Wall Paper—ca. 1873.

HELIOCHROME.

Working Drawings by William Morris.

and distinction of silhouette, depth of tone, richness of colour, gradation of tint and abundance of "crisp" detail. The principles proper to the art of the modern weaver he describes as follows: "the figures are arranged in planes close to one another, and the cloth is pretty much filled with them, a manner which gives a peculiar richness to the designs of the first years of the sixteenth century, the opposing fault to this being the arrangement of figures and landscape as in a picture proper, with foreground, middle distance, and distance"—which, at great expense, gave only, he thought, "a poor filled-up look." The late Gobelins work he despised as "no longer a fine art, but as an upholsterer's toy." It will be seen in our frontispiece and Plate III. (opposite page 16) how far these principles of ancient Arras weaving were carried into modern practice.

Embroidery he loved because it stands outside the limits imposed by weaving, even in the relatively free tapestry looms, and no mechanical process could therefore touch it on its own ground. He considered it, accordingly, the first business of the embroidress to *occupy* that post of vantage, and never to forsake it, or wander off in the direction of mechanical accuracy or cheap production, where the driver of the loom has the advantage all on his side. It was not worth while to do laboriously by hand what the loom could do better. To justify the time spent on it, embroidery should do something which could not be so well done in any other way. What was the use of freedom if you did not take advantage of it? And so a thing to seek in embroidery was perfect gradation of colour. His own embroidery designs (page 18) gave always scope for such gradation. On the other hand he



Rose pattern
printed cotton
(p. 20).
Working drawing
by William
Morris.
Ca. 1889.



Autumn Flower
pattern. Wall-
paper (p. 21).
Working
drawing by
William Morris
1888.

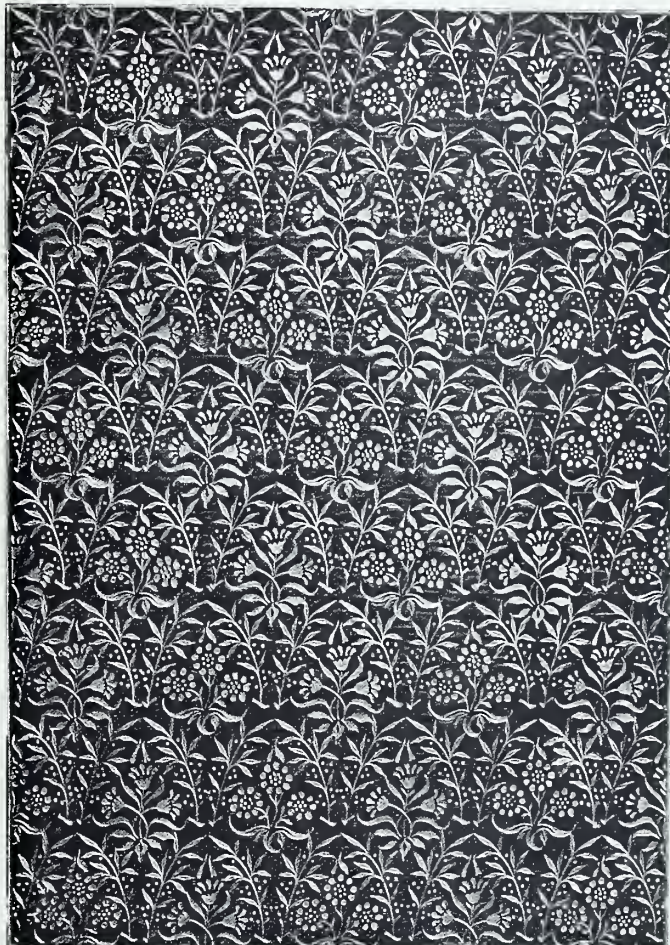
did not invariably take full advantage of the scope afforded for design in embroidery. The "Artichoke pattern" (page 18) for example, is more a pattern than it need have been for its purpose; and, large as it is in style, and admirably as it is designed for stitching, there is an element of economy in the planning it to repeat as it does, which is more in accordance with the necessities of mechanical manufacture than with the freedom possible in handwork. An obvious repeat is suggestive rather of the loom than of the needle. It is only by its delicate gradation of colour, and by the direction of the threads or strokes, that the pattern proclaims itself designed for the needle. The designer was not sparing of the needle; embroidery, he thought, was not worth doing unless either very copious and rich, or very delicate, or both. The use an embroidress made of her needle was the test of her understanding and appreciation of the art she followed; her needle strokes should be judicious, the stitches so laid as at once to explain the form, and, by the difference of their direction, to give play of colour to the silk, and do justice to its lustrousness. There was "no excuse" in embroidery for anything short of great beauty.

Morris was never more a colourist than in his Stained Glass (pages 13 and 20), advisedly "his," for, though here again Sir E. Burne-Jones designed the figures, he coloured them. It is strange that a painter, himself something of a magician in the handling of jewel-like colour, a man born, one would have said, to work in coloured light, should have been content to let even his most sympathetic

Norwich pattern. Wall-paper (p. 21). Working drawing by William Morris. 1883.



Tooled binding of an illuminated MS. of the Rubaiyat of Omar-Khayyam (p. 28). By permission of Lady Burne-Jones. Designed by William Morris. 1872.



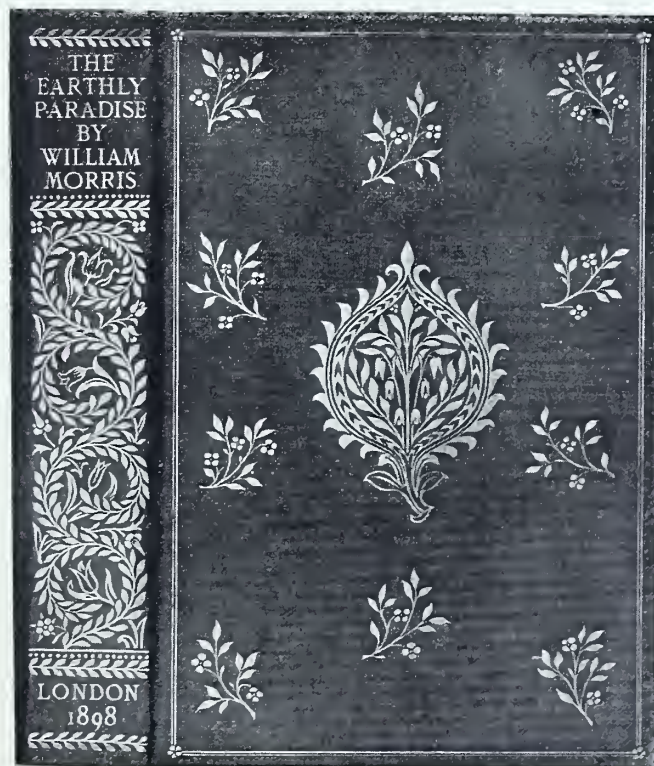
friend invent the colour for his cartoons; but so it was, although, except for a certain preponderance of green in the ornament, which speaks of Morris, the glass does not betray the fact. That it does not is proof of Morris's claims to be a colourist. In glass his theory of frank colour works out perfectly. There is an evasiveness about the quality of glass colour which makes it never too positive, whereas in distemper-painting, for example, frank colour may easily be too outspoken. The first conditions of good glass, according to Morris, were "well-balanced and shapely figures, pure and simple drawing, and a minimum of light and shade." After that he insisted upon beautiful colour, not necessarily strong, but pure and sweet, holding it only natural and becoming "that the light we stain should not be changed to dirt or ugliness." That is most rational doctrine.

In the matter of tile-painting, Morris contented himself, for the most part, with work more strictly on a par with glass-painting than with ceramics. Latterly some of his more important tile designs, such as the panel on page 19, were executed by Mr. De Morgan. The hawthorn pattern on the same page was designed by the late Miss Faulkner, the sister of his friend and partner. It is sometimes questioned whether Morris really designed all the work published in his name—practically he did. Now and then one of his assistants produced a design of his own, which was published by Morris and Co., but these were very few indeed; and in a sense they too were the work of the master, who so inspired his pupils that their work might easily be taken for his: he was the last man to lay claim to what he did not do.

Of his work in house decoration it is impossible to speak adequately in the short space possible here to devote to it. It will be seen from the picture of Stanmore

Hall (page 15) that he was never afraid of pattern, indulging in it to an extent which, in the case of an artist less expert, would have been dangerous; but out of elaboration he managed, like the Orientals, to get repose, owing largely to his command of colour. The result of decoration, he said, must be colour not colours; and he lived up to his principle. Decoration was to him not so much a luxury as a necessity. He could hardly imagine a puritan preference for bare walls, but he was quite sure that whoever had such a preference must be "in an unhealthy state of mind, and probably of body also." One of the chief reasons of art, he held, was to make our houses at once beautiful and restful. He preferred hand-painting, but if not that, let us have the next best thing to it—tapestry, silk, printed cotton, wall-paper—anyway, "something that can be done by a great many people without too much difficulty and with pleasure." Stencilling was too mechanical a process to find favour in his eyes; he never used it except for the most insignificant diaper work; and with him, therefore, painting was necessarily rather a costly business. Examples of his painted detail occur on pages 7, 14, 21, 22, and on Plate II. (opposite page 8). The handsome scrollwork on page 7 was designed for the soffits of the open arches on the staircase of St. James's Palace (1881) to go with one of his most sumptuous wall-papers, first used there. By way of exception to his almost invariable practice of employing only his own patterns, he there also made use of two of Jeffrey and Co.'s leather papers, the one by Walter Crane, the other by B. J. Talbert, both of them curiously enough including *amorini* in their design—*amorini* were not much in Morris's way. A favourite plan of his was, where it was possible, to use oak wainscoting for the lower walls and Arras tapestry above.

The idea of printing according to his own notion of what a book should be, arose in the mind of Morris as early as 1865; for about that time he not only contemplated an edition of "The Earthly Paradise" (p. 27) illustrated by Burne-Jones, but began to work at it. Many



Cloth binding of "The Earthly Paradise" (p. 27). Designed by William Morris. Published by Messrs. Longmans, Green and Co.

designs appear to have been made, and one or two of these at least he cut on wood with his own hand, very much after the manner, it need hardly be said, of the early Gothic wood-cuts. The project came to naught, and the idea of printing seems to have lain half torpid in his mind, occasionally stirring as if it were about to take active shape, but not doing so to any very serious purpose until, after producing a trial book or two with the Chiswick Press, he set up, during 1890, his own hand-presses, and at the beginning of the following year began to issue the famous publications of the Kelmscott press.

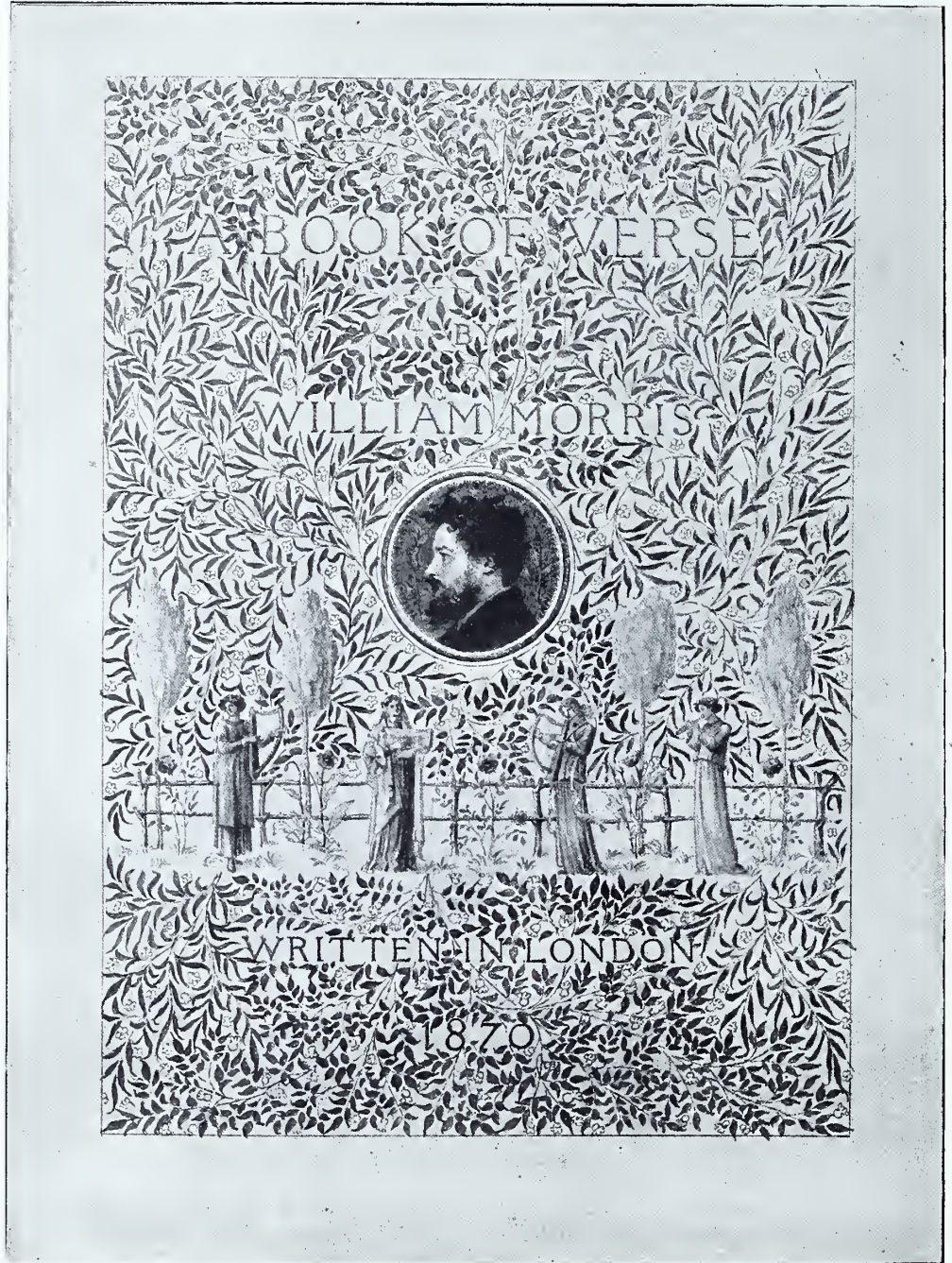
Here once more by a sort of irony of fate he laboured for the few. He had not faith enough in the public to bring out anything but limited editions; which, of course, got into the hands of bibliophiles, and speculators who bought for a rise in price, and not of lovers of the book beautiful. It seems more than ever unfortunate that in this matter of book-printing, probably the very easiest way in which the intellectual life of the million can be made fuller, the socialist should have fallen so far short of his ideal of art for the people. And it is a question whether his books would not have gained by less luxurious ornamentation. His page is sometimes overladen, and the repetition even of the beautiful borders in the Chaucer begins to weary you before you get to the end of the volume. One feels too that some of the brush-drawn detail of the ornament, nobly as it is designed, is not delicate enough for the pages of a book, even when the type is as manly as the printer's own.

In devising his types Morris did a real service to typography. Printers generally will no doubt persist in wanting rather lighter type than his; but they cannot help learning from him: he has demonstrated, not only the poverty of modern type, but how much better it can easily be made. It is matter of regret that this side of Morris's art is not here illustrated, his trustees having resolutely declined to lend any of the blocks. They are apparently under the impression that Morris would not have countenanced the reproduction of any of his book ornaments by a photographic process. Certainly he was no great friend to photography. But it was a friend to him, assisting him, as it happened, materially in the design of his very type; for it was by the examination of numerous specimens of old printing, enlarged by photo-

graphy to a size convenient to be studied, that he convinced himself as to what had best be done in the way of new types.

Some amends for this gap in our illustrations are made by the reproductions on pages 22, 27, 28, 29, and 30, from his illuminations, which, by the kindness of Lady Burne-Jones and Sir Philip Burne-Jones, we are enabled to give. They contrast rather strangely by the ex-

Title-page to
"A Book of
Verse," by
William Morris.
Written in
London (p. 28),
1870.
By permission
of Lady Burne-
Jones.



trede delicacy of their workmanship, with the roughness of his printed ornaments. The calligraphy is beautiful. Even the fair copy of some of his MSS. is remarkable; but the engrossing of these illuminated volumes shows the artist proficient in yet another craft. It is interesting to note that the illuminated ornament is not, as a rule, strongly influenced by mediæval workmanship—being often freely and even sketchily drawn, never with a precise line. It looks almost as if the leafage on pages 28 and 29 might have been first sketched with the brush in colour, and the pen outline added

Thorarin sings of the Newlithe matters

There from Hilda's fish at least
 Got the raven goodly feast.
 And there withal he told the tidings; then said
 Vermund, "But why didst thou go after them, didst
 thou not deem that enough had been done at first?"
 Thorarin sang;
 Scatterer of red Odins flame
 Men of me spake words of blame
 Oft before these days I had
 Grey wolfs maw would I make glad
 These law-tanglers said that I
 With sharp edge smote haplessly
 Her that fairest webb doth hide
 Nor their taunts might I abide
 Thou art excused though thou didst not abide
 that," said Vermund; "but what sort of men did
 the outlanders show themselves to be?" sang Thorarin:
 Nail did give the grey birds meat
 Scant enow, for scared and fleet
 Off he ran unto the fell
 Whoso might do ill or well;
 Alfgeir was of better heart
 And right manlike played his part
 Helmet-hid in battle-song

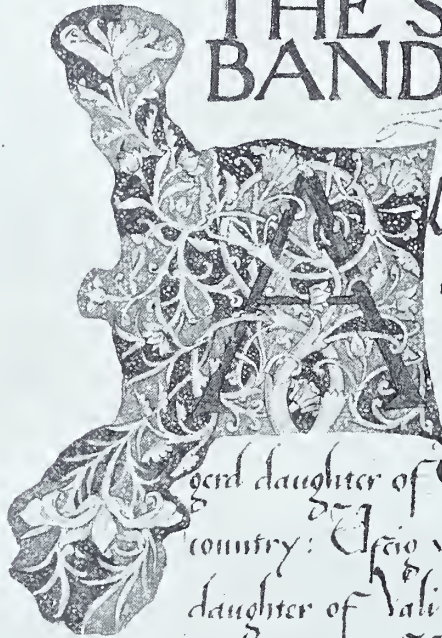
Part of a page from "Icelandic Stories" (p. 28). Translated and engrossed by William Morris. By permission of Lady Burne-Jones.

58

Utg told of

THE STORY OF THE BANDED-MEN

Chap. I. Of Ulfeg and Vili his son



Ulfeg named Ulfeg dwelt west away in Midfirth at a stead called Reeks: he was the son of Skidi, and his mother is called Sunnlaug, whose mother was Jarngerd daughter of Ulfeg Jarngerdson of Skard in the north-country: Ulfeg was wedded to a woman called Thorgerd daughter of Vali; she came of great kin, and was a stirring woman. Ulfeg was a wise man, and full of good counsel; he was great-hearted in all wise, but unhandy at

Bachelor's button pattern (p. 18). Small sketch-design by William Morris. 1892.

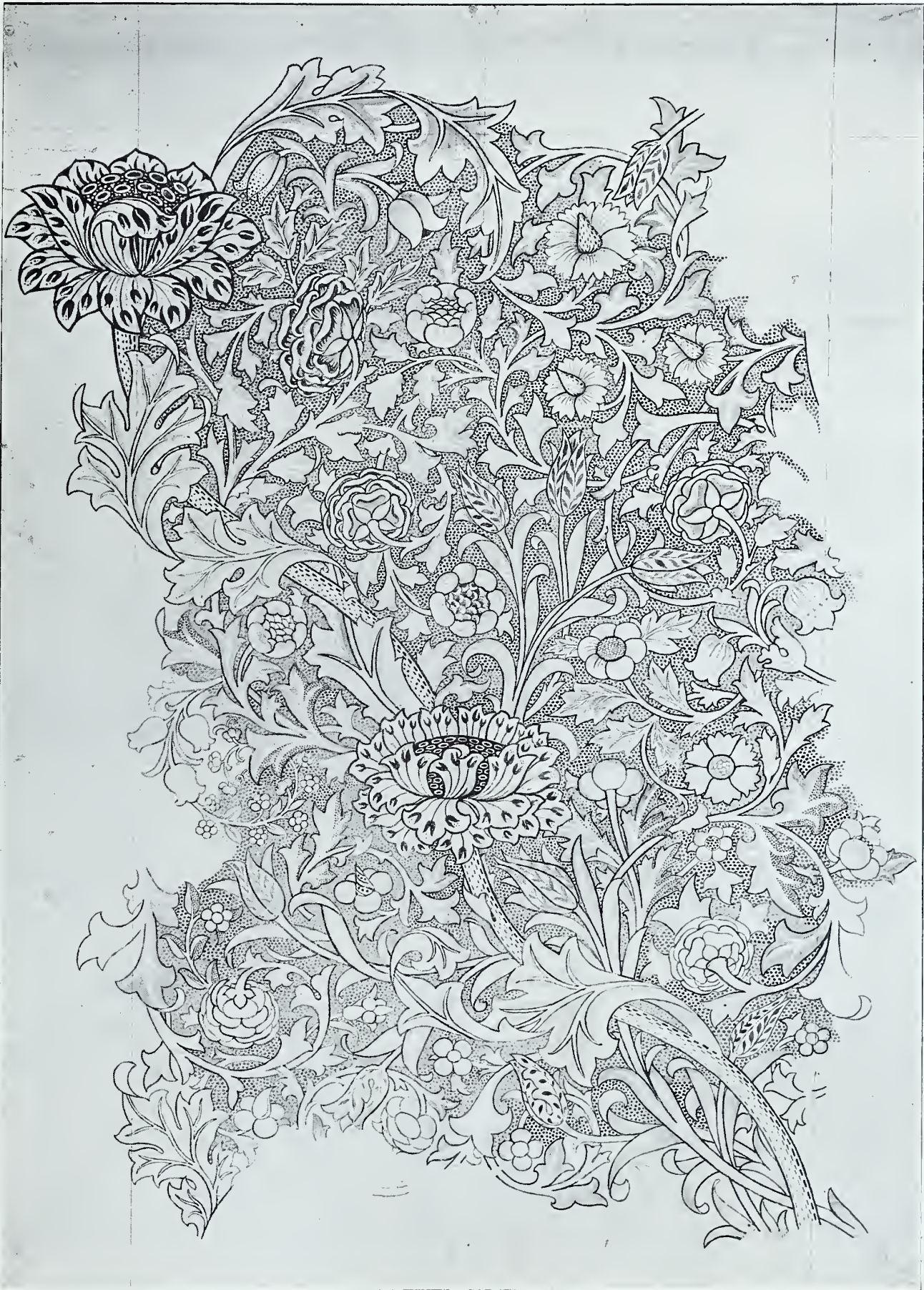


afterwards. The colour again is the artist's own, inclining more to natural green than to the primary tints employed in old missals.

Among the few branches of design Morris does not seem to have touched is metal-work—perhaps because it gave no opportunity for colour, perhaps because smithing had been revived before his time. He, or his firm, was responsible for a great deal of furniture, but it was designed mainly by his friend, Mr. Philip Webb, and carved or inlaid from designs by Mr. Jack.

It will be seen from the account of Morris's work here given, short as it is, and inadequate as it must necessarily be, that it was only by, in turn, pursuing one craft after another that a man, whatever his natural energy, could ever have brought so many to success.

The various trades in which he was engaged were all, it is true, going on at the same time, but mostly without any very active part being taken in them by him. He had trained men to work in his way, and the work went on in many cases with only very occasional reference to him for help or advice. Mr. H. Dearle, for example, who has designed the wrapper for this Annual, learnt to work so like him that the design of the pupil may well be mistaken, even by the experienced in design, for that of the master. As a matter of fact great part of the floral and other detail in the tapestries woven at Merton is entirely his. He, too, has of late years overlooked the tapestry weavers. In the same way Morris's partner, Mr. Frank Smith, has for many years past virtually controlled the decoration for which he was nominally responsible. The truth is, Morris acted latterly more as consulting adviser to



"Trent"
pattern.
Printed linen.
(p. 20).
Working drawing by
William Morris.
Ca. 1892.

the firm bearing his name than as designer of decoration, though he from time to time designed certain details of decoration as well as new patterns for fabrics. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the work of the firm of Morris & Co. (to whom, by the way, we are indebted for great part of our illustrations) is going on to this day much as it did in his lifetime. And so it may be said he founded a school of art which survives him.

It would have been impossible to discuss the art of William Morris without constant reference to the man he was. The work of an artist is always, of course, the expression of the man—more or less. Sometimes it expresses only one side of him, the better half, and to make the acquaintance of the man is to think less of him. It was not so with Morris. To know him was to understand his work better—but you felt he was the man to do just such work, it corresponded with him perfectly. Its merits were a reflection of the qualities of the man, and its defects (the shadeside, so to speak, of the merits) were equally personal. One sees in his design always the exuberance of the man, the impulsiveness, the big-boyishness, just as one sees his genuineness, his hatred of compromise or makeshift. He was characteristically impatient, given to think all who differed from him fools, but only for a moment. He would storm, but the lull soon came, and then he was the most reasonable of beings. It seemed as though he wanted to have it all his own way; yet, put him in the chair at a meeting and he was as patient as the mildest of us. Events proved him to be not a bad man of business, though the ordinary ways of trade were too mean for him. His idea of honest dealing was to “eschew all bargains real or imaginary, and to be anxious to pay and to

get what a piece of goods is really worth.” One wonders almost at such a man’s hating puritanism. But there you saw the artist in revolt against strait-lacing. Genial as he was, and friendly, easy of access always, he did not often let one get quite close to him; even in his verse, in which most men let themselves out, he does not tell us much of his own thought or feeling; his poetry, for all his tremendous personality, is impersonal.

Morris was a man of such pronounced individuality, and the ideas he adopted he made so entirely his own, that those who heard them first from his lips can hardly believe that he did not evolve them entirely out of his inner consciousness. If they were to read “The Seven Lamps,” they would think Ruskin was quoting him, so familiar to them would the words seem at times. He did not, of course, by any means originate the idea of making modern life beautiful, but he adopted it with all his heart, and was quite the most powerful exponent of it in our day. He stamped himself upon our decorative art, and it will bear for future generations the impress of his genius.

Morris has exercised considerable influence upon manufacture, but only indirectly, his methods being professedly those of art. He did not pretend to meet the demand of the times.

He held those demands to be (as partly they are) absolutely unjustifiable. He left, therefore, something for others to do, a wider work than his, and a more difficult by far—the task, namely, of directing, in the way they should artistically go, methods of manufacture which, disapprove them who may, must presently come into almost exclusive use. His task is done, and done right well. The greatest pleasure in life, he said, was the pleasure of creating beautiful things. He may be counted a very happy man

LEWIS F. DAY.



Photo. Fred. Hollyer.

William Morris

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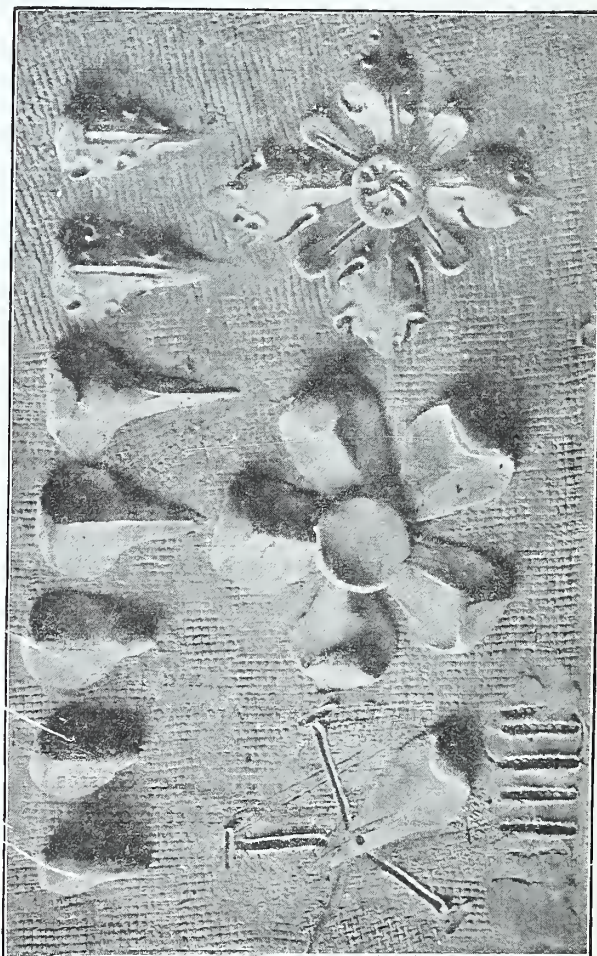
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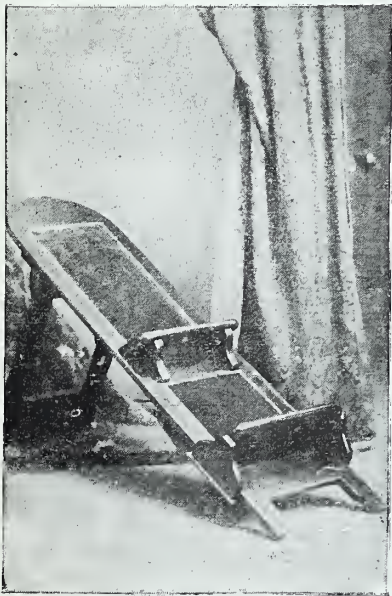
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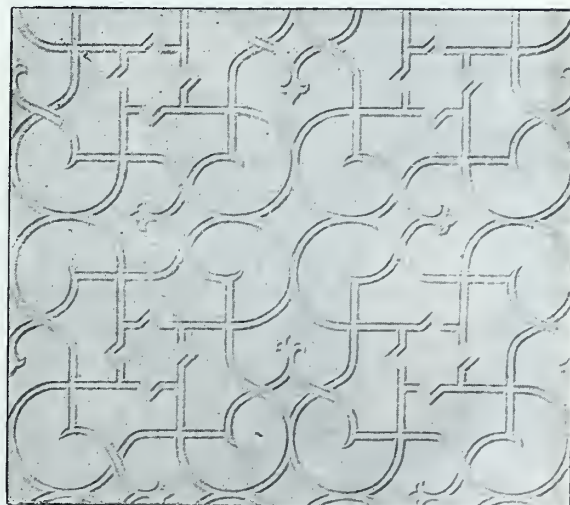
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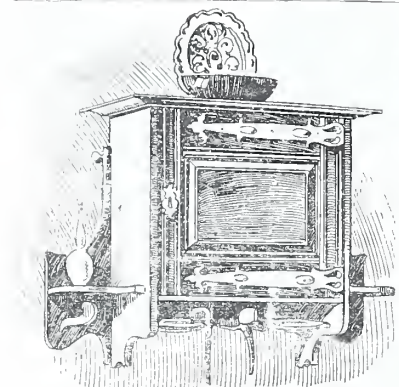
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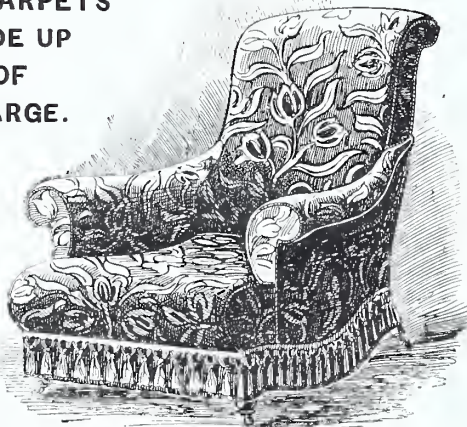
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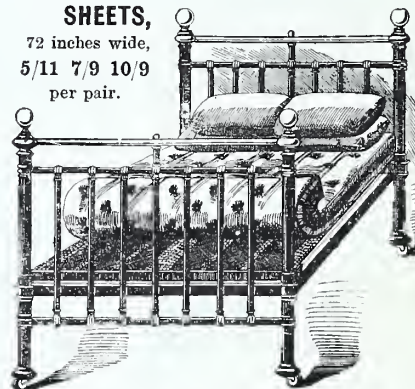
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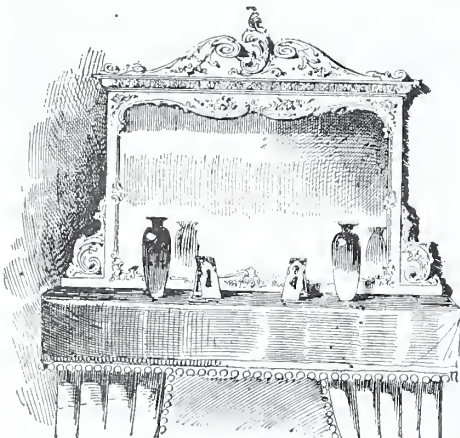


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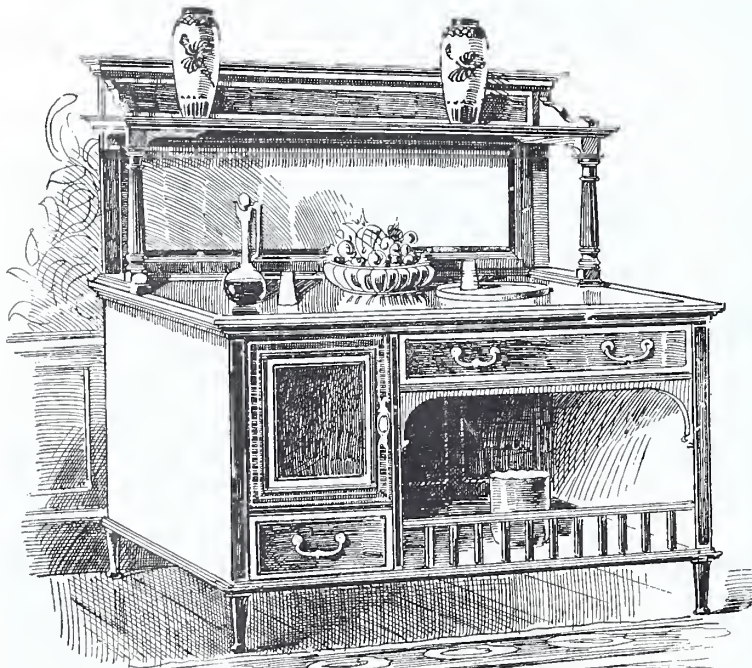
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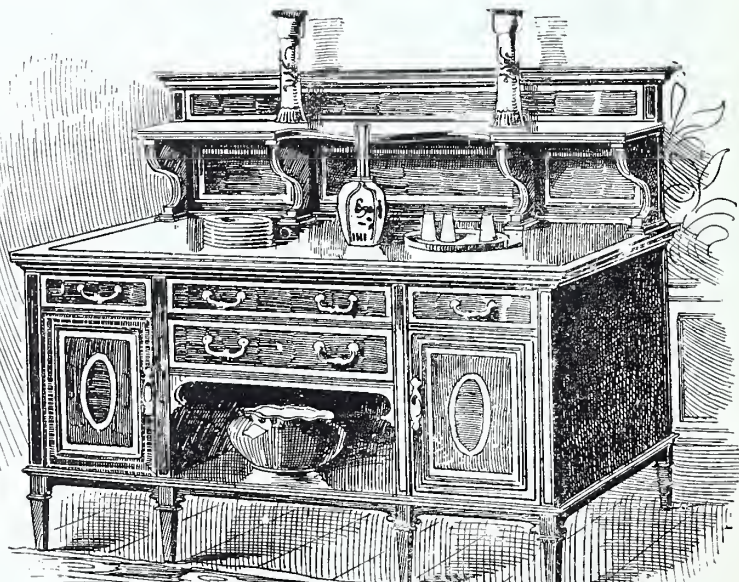
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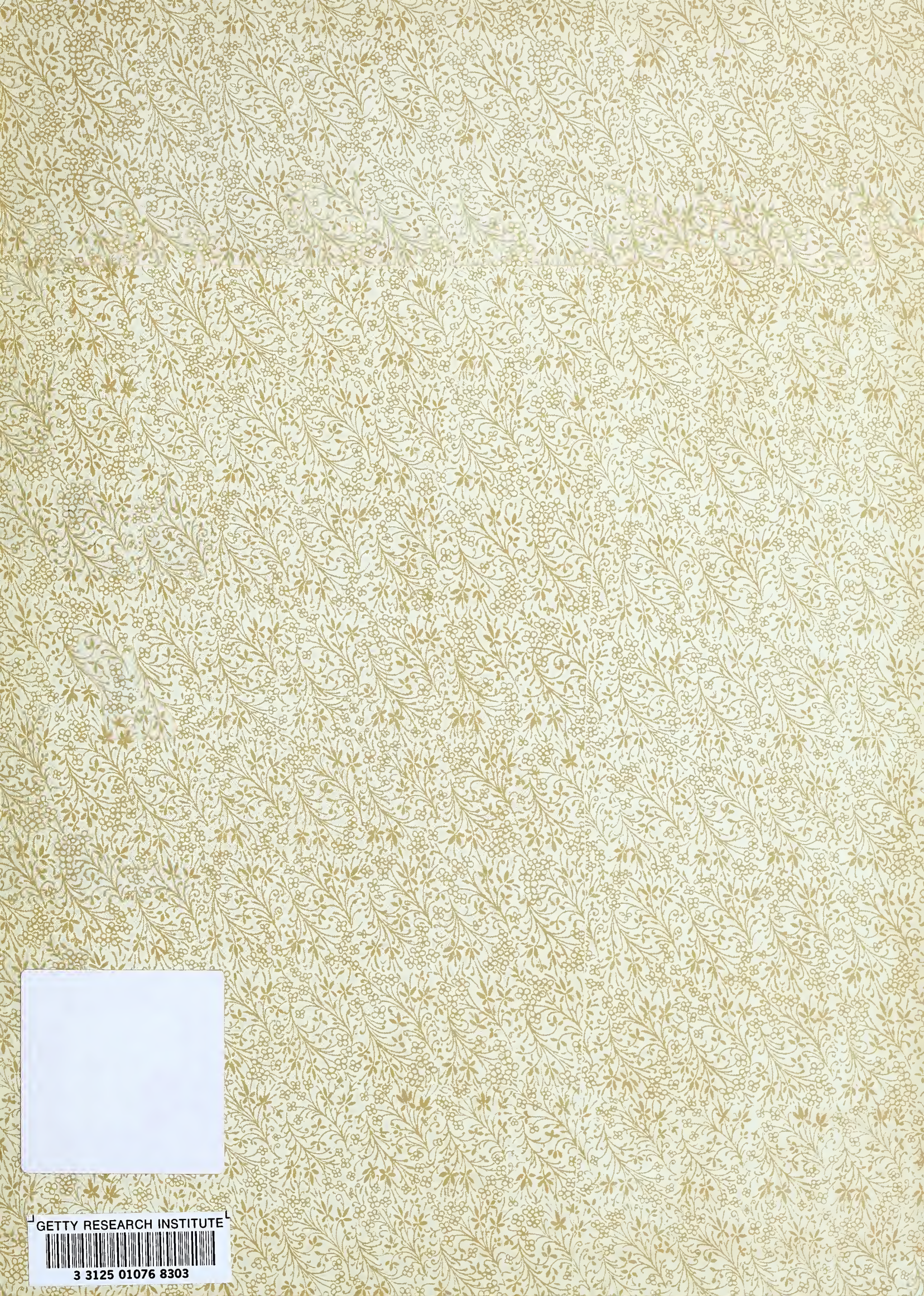
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